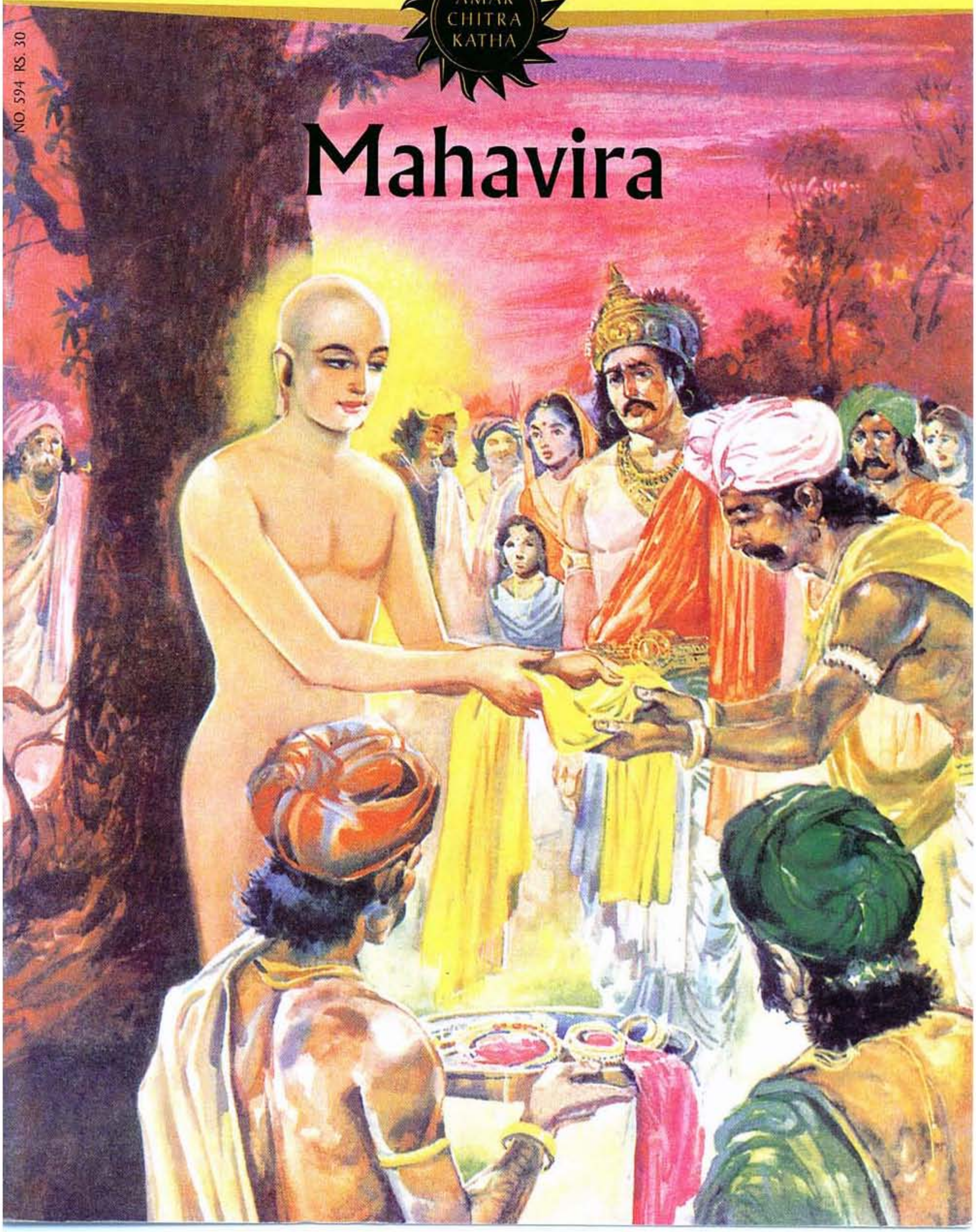
NO. 594 RS. 30

AMAR CHITRA KATHA

Mahavira



Illustrated Classics From India

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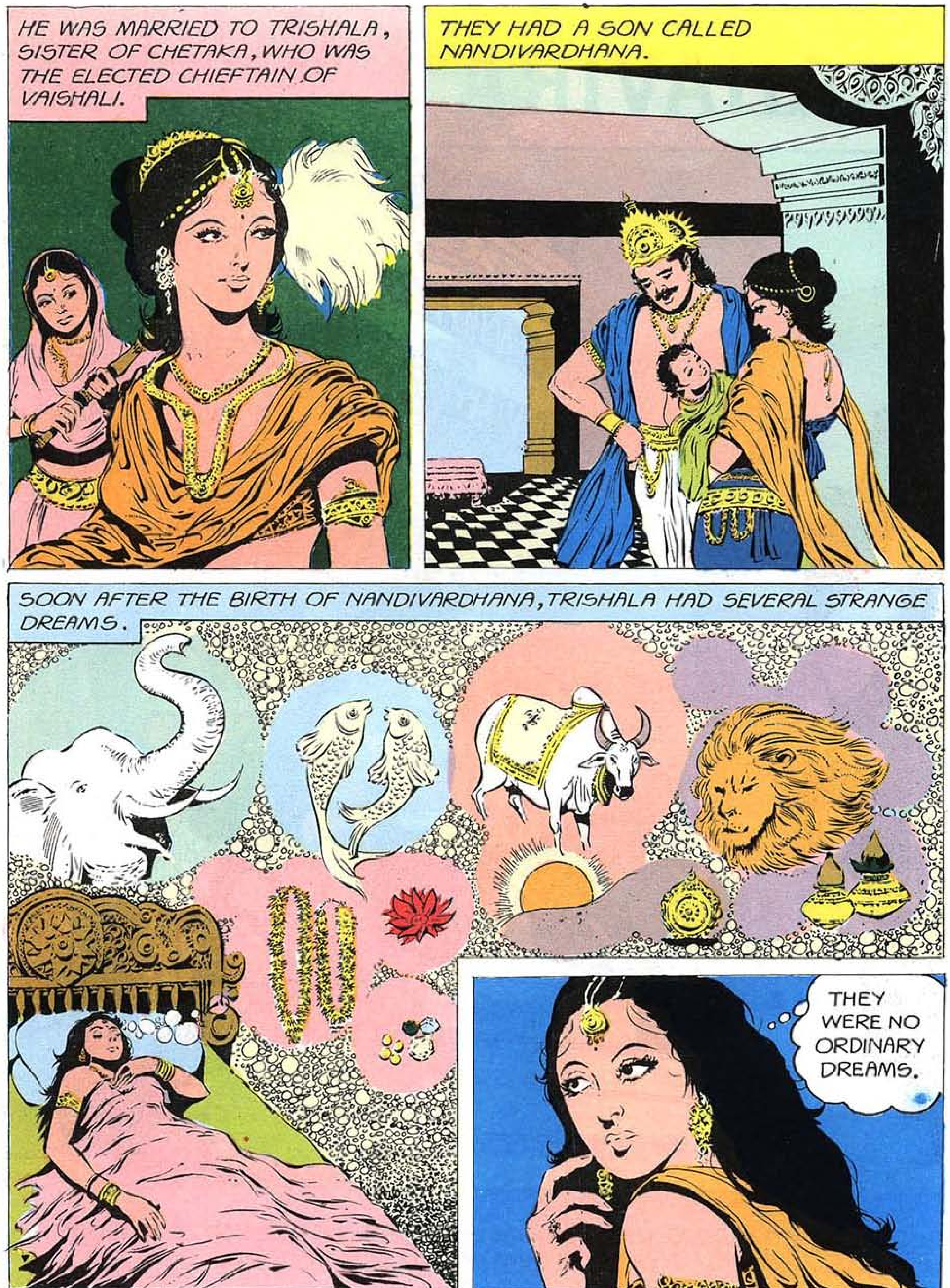
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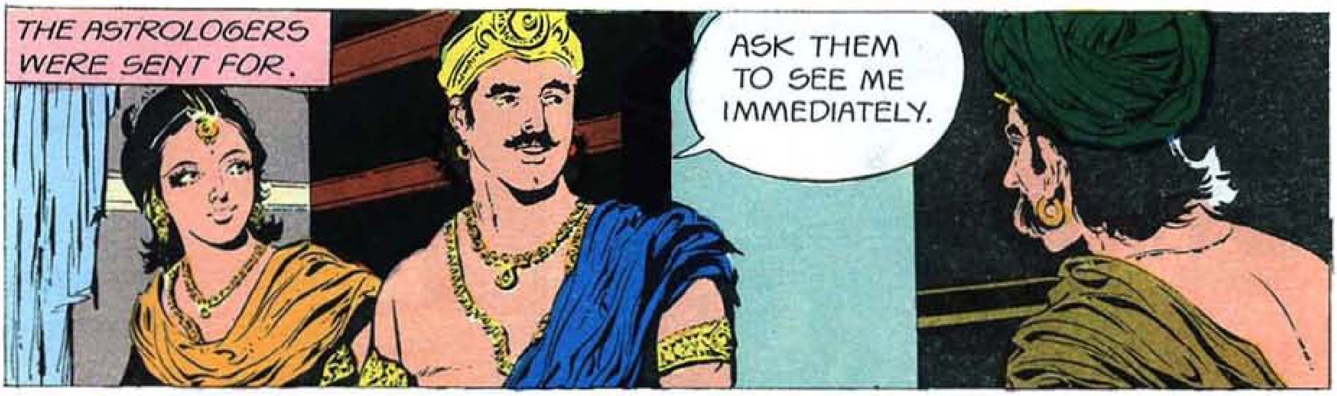
INDIA BOOK HOUSE

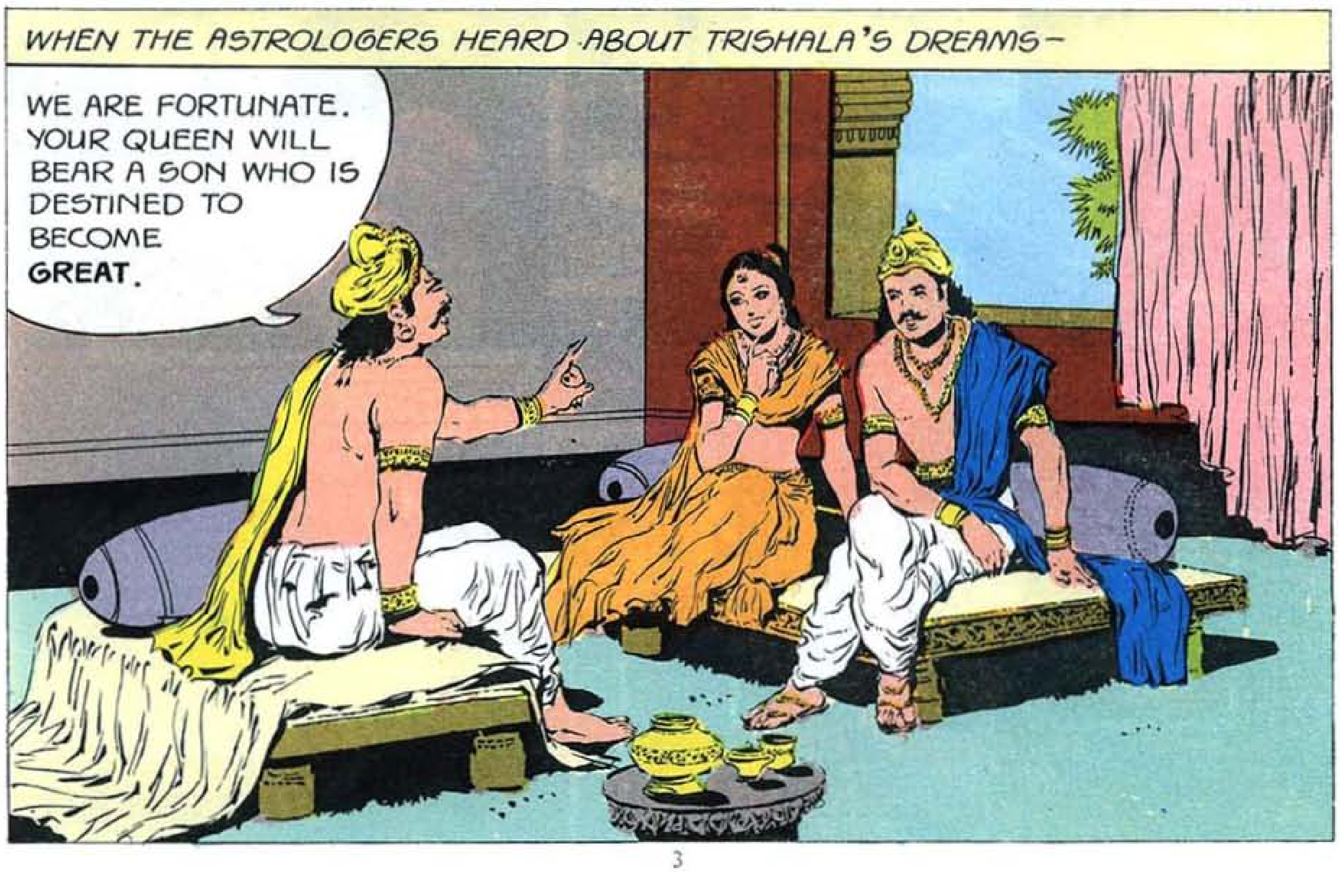
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MAHAVIRA
ABOUT 2,500 YEARS AGO THERE LIVED IN KUNDAGRAM, NEAR VAISHALI IN BIHAR, A KING CALLED SIDDHARTHA.


HE WAS MARRIED TO TRISHALA, SISTER OF CHETAKA, WHO WAS THE ELECTED CHIEFTAIN OF VAISHALI.
THEY HAD A SON CALLED NANDIVARDHANA.
SOON AFTER THE BIRTH OF NANDIVARDHANA, TRISHALA HAD SEVERAL STRANGE DREAMS.
THEY WERE NO ORDINARY DREAMS.


WHEN SHE TOLD SIDDHARTHA ABOUT THEM –
LET US CONSULT THE ASTROLOGERS.


THE ASTROLOGERS WERE SENT FOR.
ASK THEM TO SEE ME IMMEDIATELY.


WHEN THE ASTROLOGERS HEARD ABOUT TRISHALA'S DREAMS –
WE ARE FORTUNATE. YOUR QUEEN WILL BEAR A SON WHO IS DESTINED TO BECOME **GREAT**.

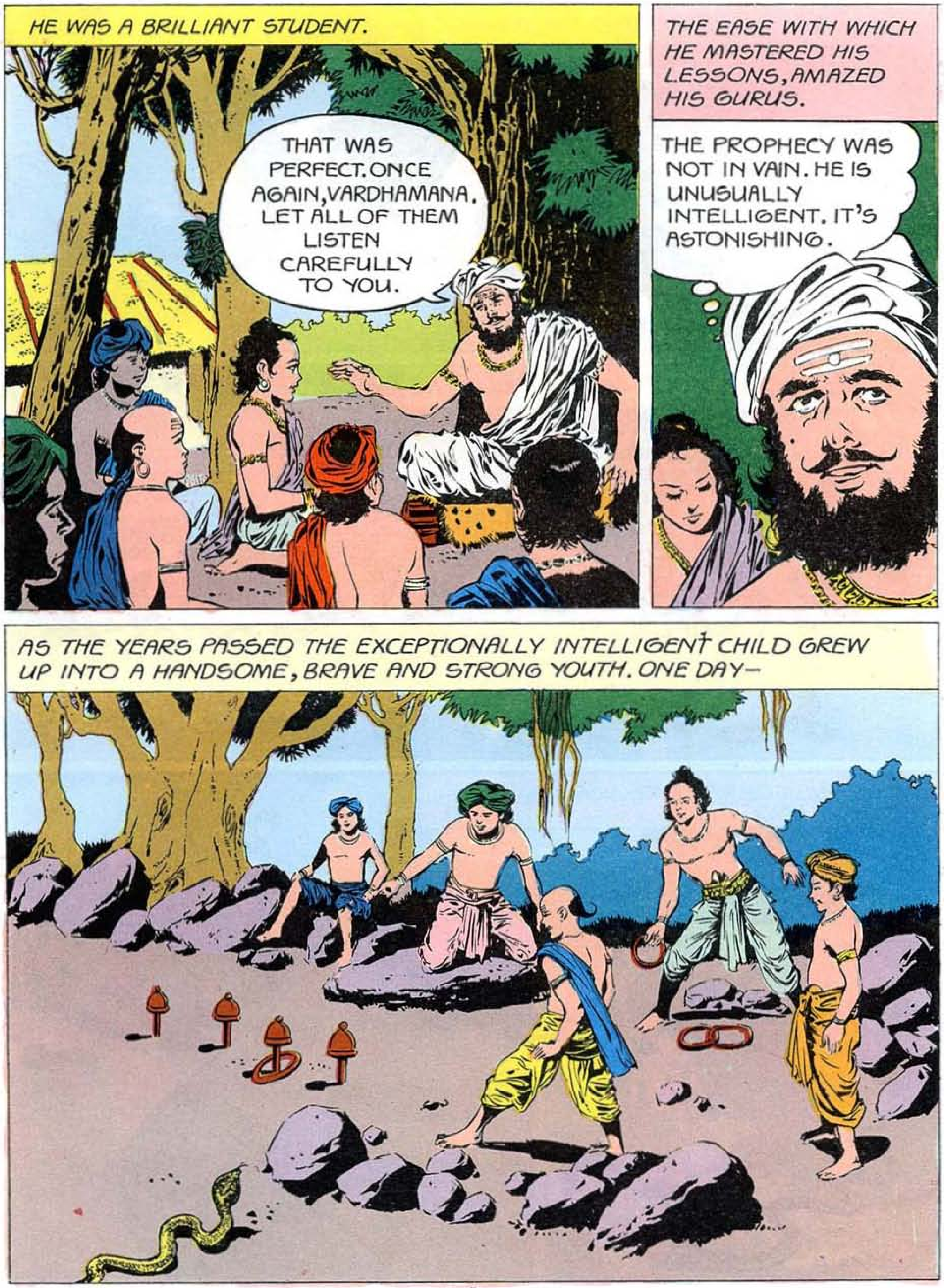

TRISHALA AND SIDDHARTHA WERE OVERJOYED.
LET US HAVE A GRAND FEAST AND INVITE EVERY PERSON IN THE KINGDOM, BE HE RICH OR POOR, YOUNG OR OLD.
YES. AND AFTER THE FEAST WE COULD DISTRIBUTE GIFTS TO THE POOR AND THE LEARNED.
THE FEAST WAS ARRANGED...
...AND THE ALMS GIVEN.
TRISHALA WAITED ANXIOUSLY FOR HER SON TO BE BORN.
I CANNOT WAIT TO HOLD MY SON IN MY ARMS.

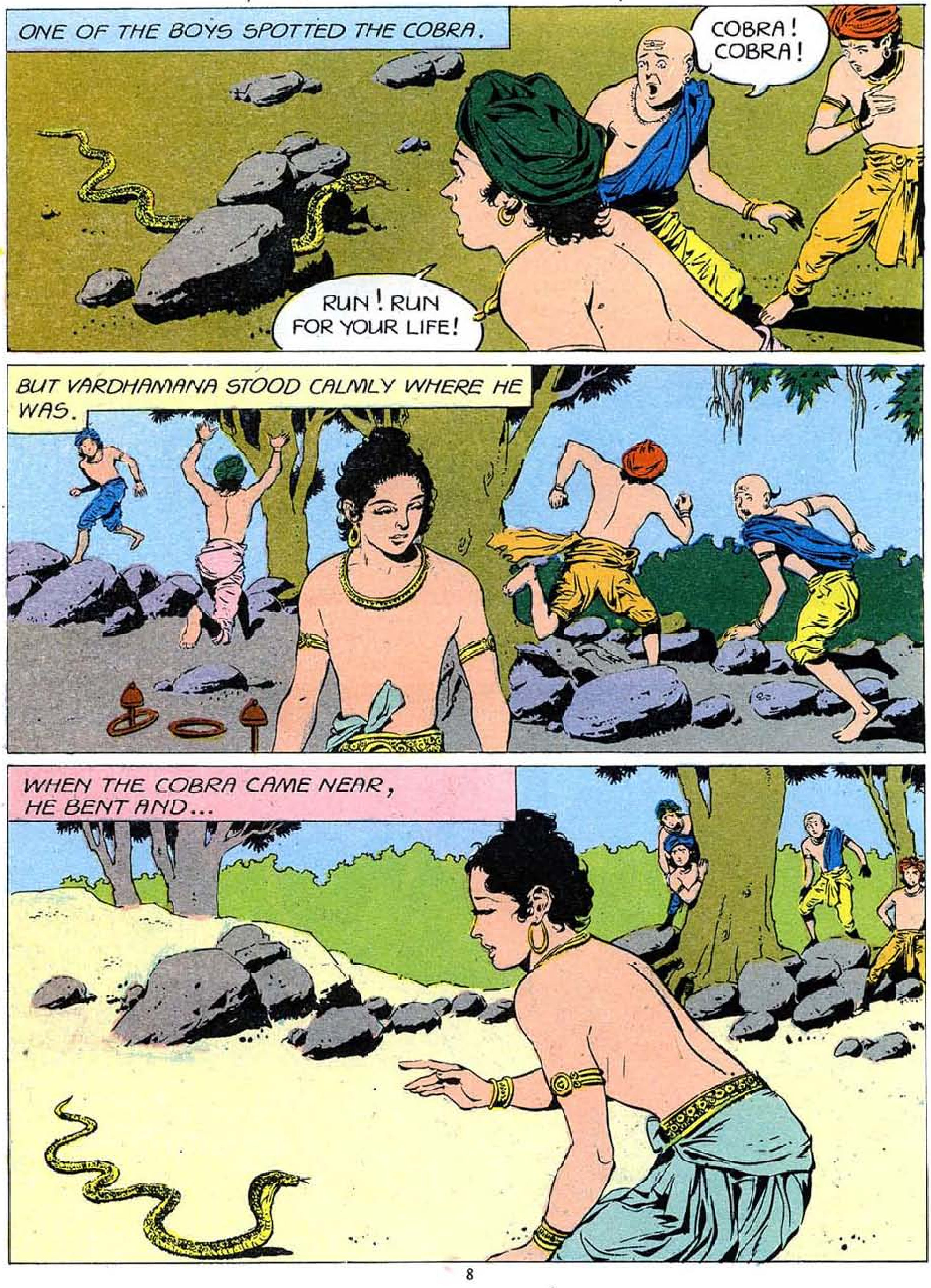


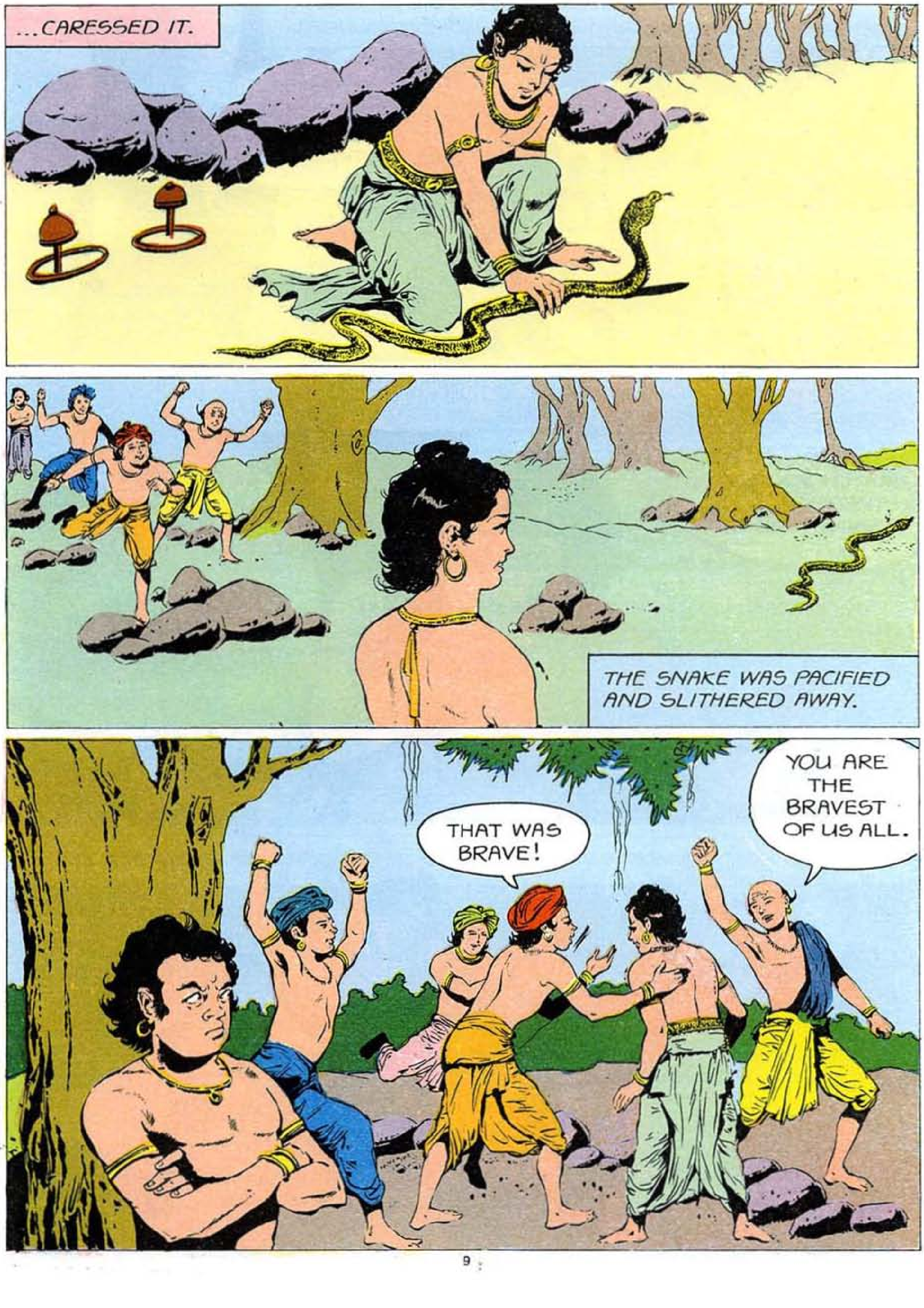
* THE FIRST MONTH ACCORDING TO THE LUNAR CALENDAR OF THE HINDUS.

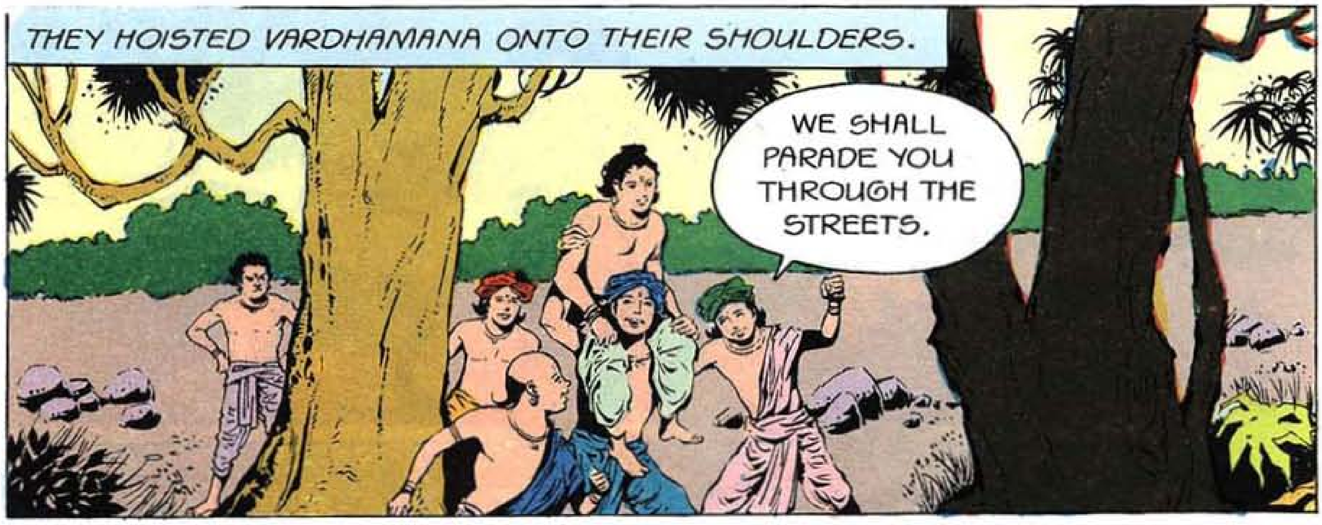

THE BOY VARDHAMANA WAS IN EVERY WAY AN IDEAL PRINCE.
OUR SON IS INDEED THE PRINCE OF PRINCES. SEE HOW NOBLY HE CARRIES HIMSELF.
HE IS AS NOBLE AS HE LOOKS.
DON'T YOU THINK IT'S TIME HE BEGAN HIS FORMAL INSTRUCTION?
YES, YOU ARE RIGHT. I SHALL ATTEND TO IT.
SO VARDHAMANA BEGAN GOING TO A GURU.*

* TEACHER

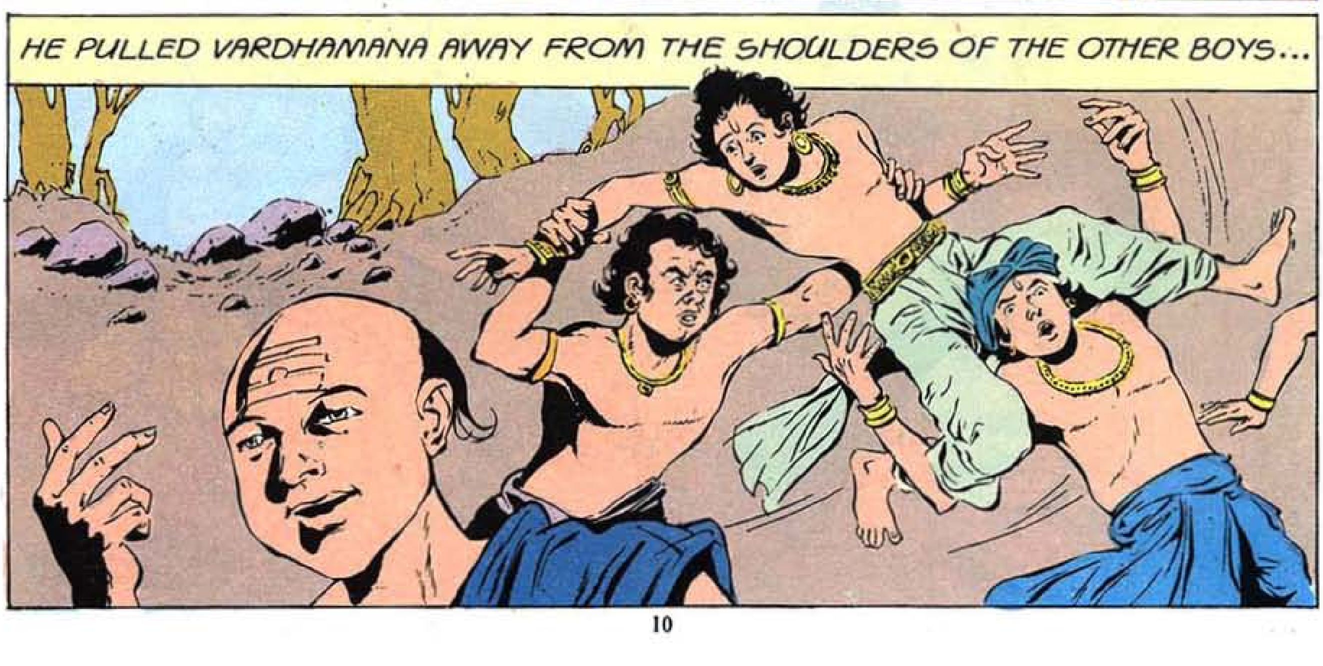

HE WAS A BRILLIANT STUDENT.
THAT WAS PERFECT. ONCE AGAIN, VARDHAMANA. LET ALL OF THEM LISTEN CAREFULLY TO YOU.
THE EASE WITH WHICH HE MASTERED HIS LESSONS, AMAZED HIS GURUS.
THE PROPHECY WAS NOT IN VAIN. HE IS UNUSUALLY INTELLIGENT. IT'S ASTONISHING.
AS THE YEARS PASSED THE EXCEPTIONALLY INTELLIGENT CHILD GREW UP INTO A HANDSOME, BRAVE AND STRONG YOUTH. ONE DAY—


ONE OF THE BOYS SPOTTED THE COBRA.
COBRA! COBRA!
RUN! RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!
BUT VARDHAMANA STOOD CALMLY WHERE HE WAS.
WHEN THE COBRA CAME NEAR, HE BENT AND...

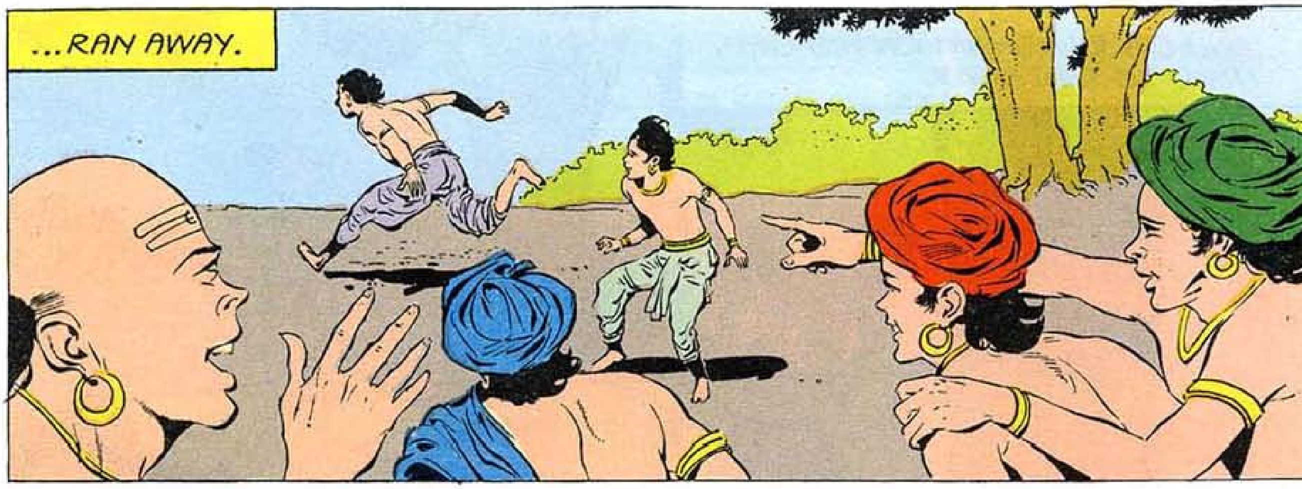

...CARESSED IT.
THE SNAKE WAS PACIFIED AND SLITHERED AWAY.
THAT WAS BRAVE!
YOU ARE THE BRAVEST OF US ALL.


THEY HOISTED VARDHAMANA ONTO THEIR SHOULDERS.
WE SHALL PARADE YOU THROUGH THE STREETS.

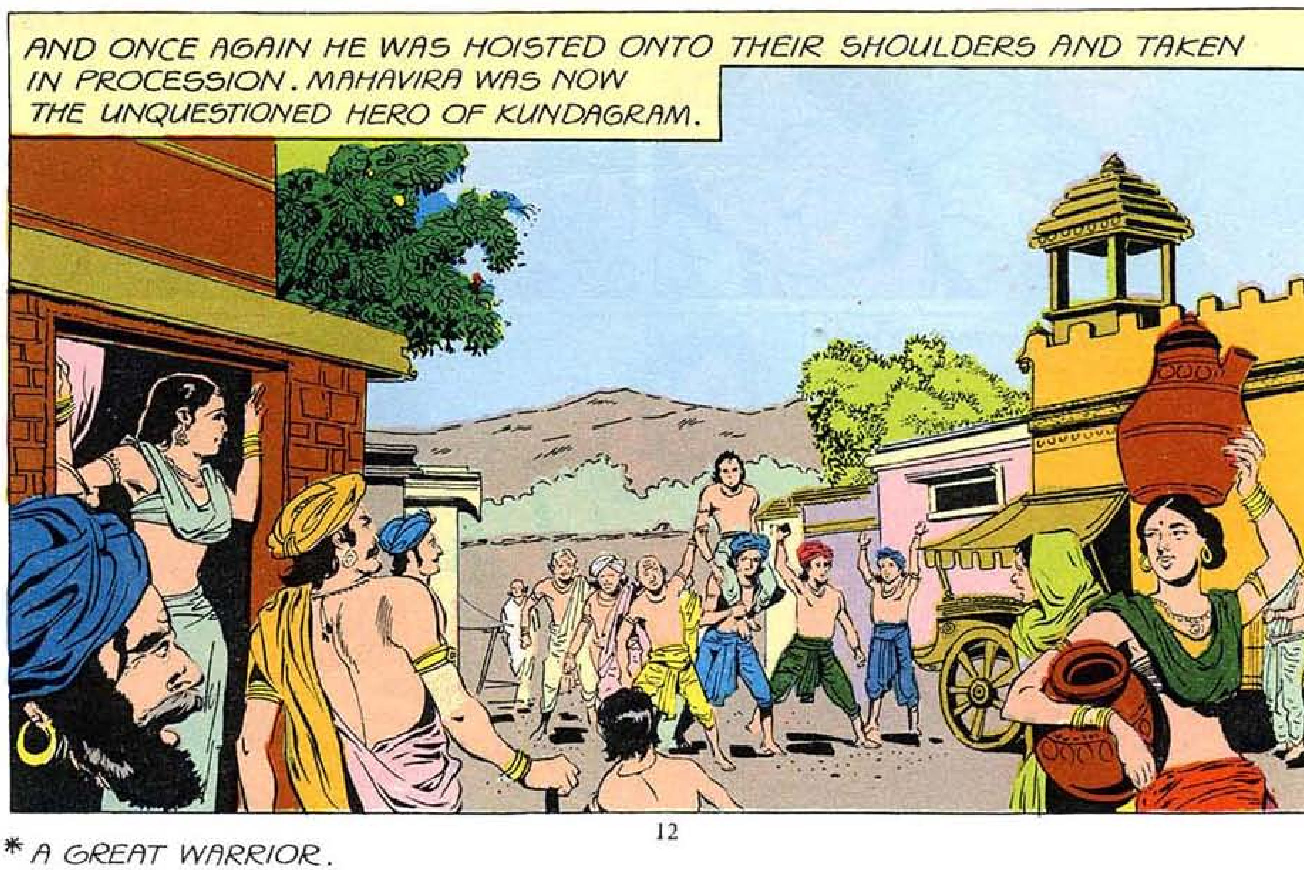

BUT ONE OF THEM WHO WAS A BIG BULLY, AND CONSIDERED HIMSELF THE BRAVEST OF ALL, DID NOT LIKE THIS.
LET'S SEE YOU MATCH YOUR STRENGTH AGAINST MINE.


HE PULLED VARDHAMANA AWAY FROM THE SHOULDERS OF THE OTHER BOYS...

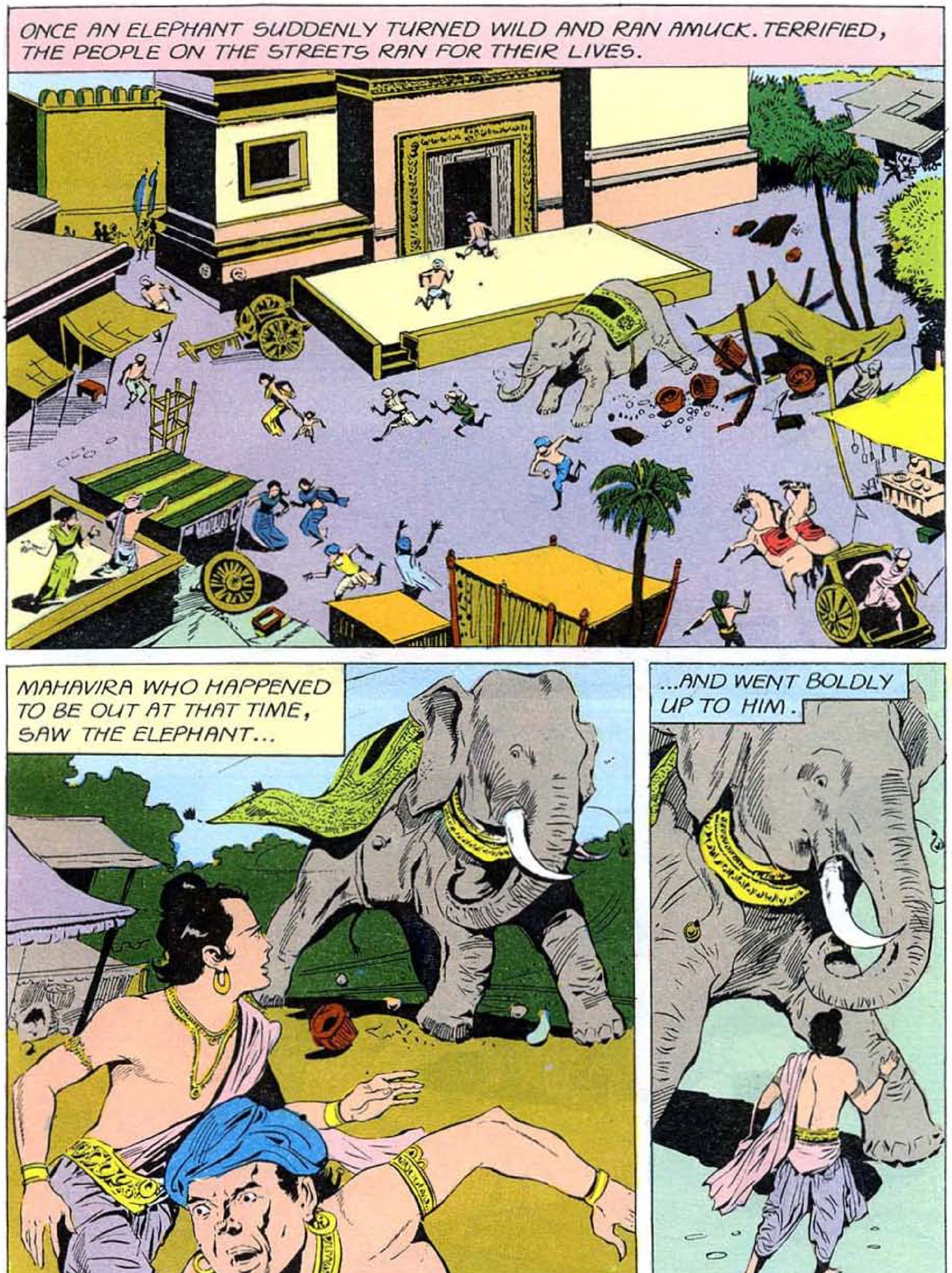

...AND CARRYING HIM ON HIS OWN, TRIED TO RUN AWAY.
LET ME GO!
VARDHAMANA PUMMELLED HIM WITH HIS FISTS TILL THE BULLY SCREAMED...
...THREW VARDHAMANA DOWN AND...

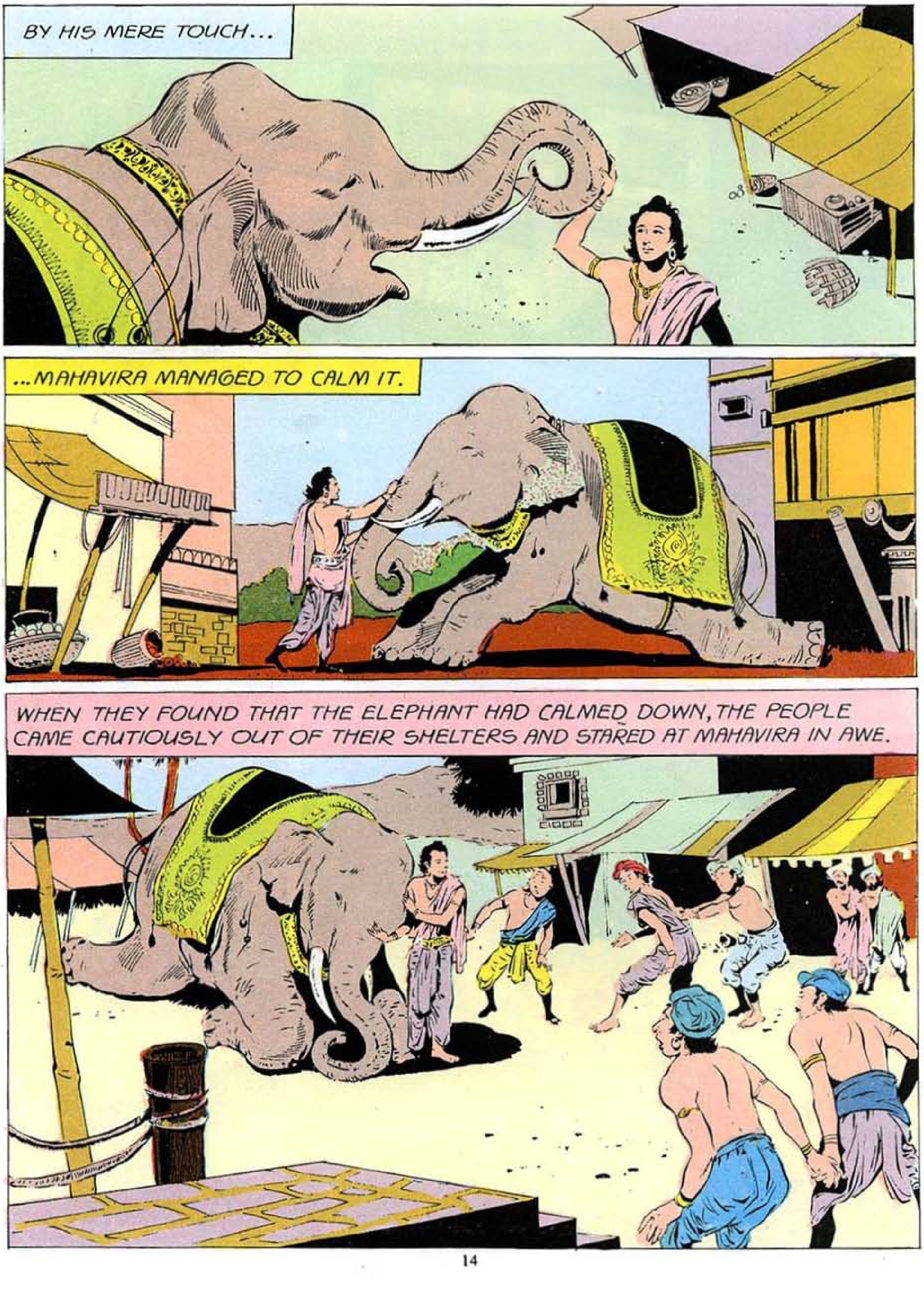


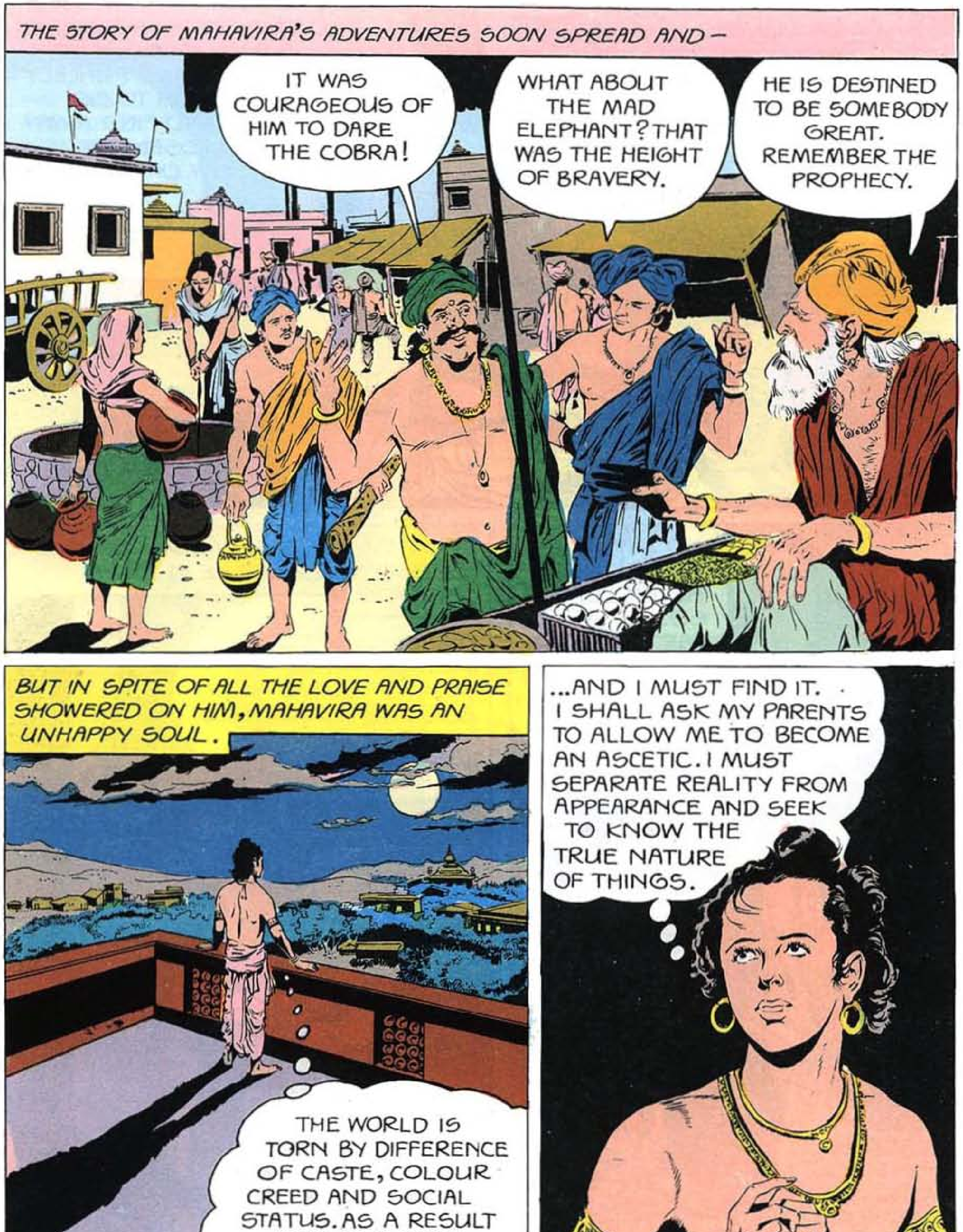




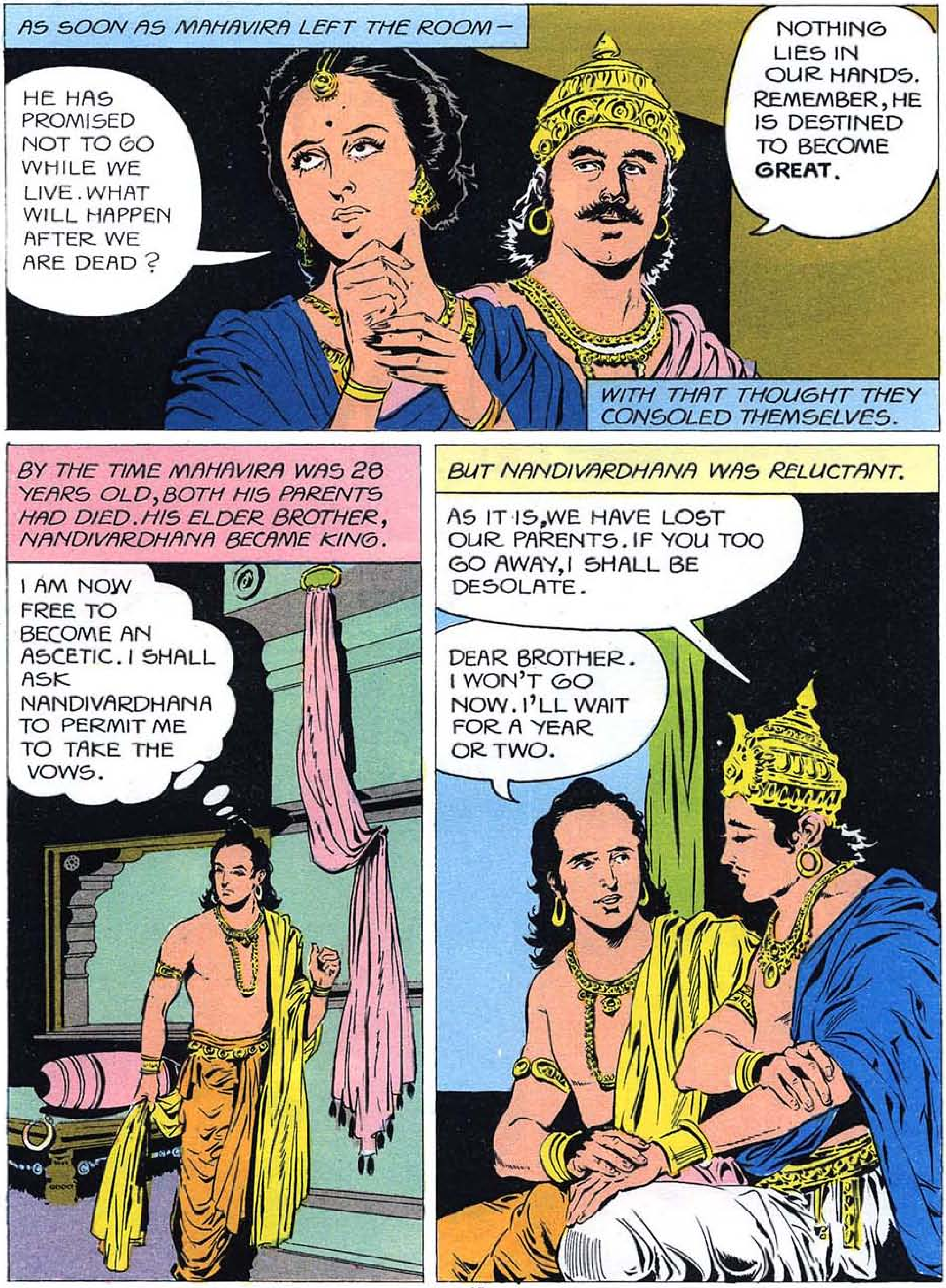
* A GREAT WARRIOR.


ONCE AN ELEPHANT SUDDENLY TURNED WILD AND RAN AMUCK. TERRIFIED, THE PEOPLE ON THE STREETS RAN FOR THEIR LIVES.
MAHAVIRA WHO HAPPENED TO BE OUT AT THAT TIME, SAW THE ELEPHANT...
...AND WENT BOLDLY UP TO HIM.

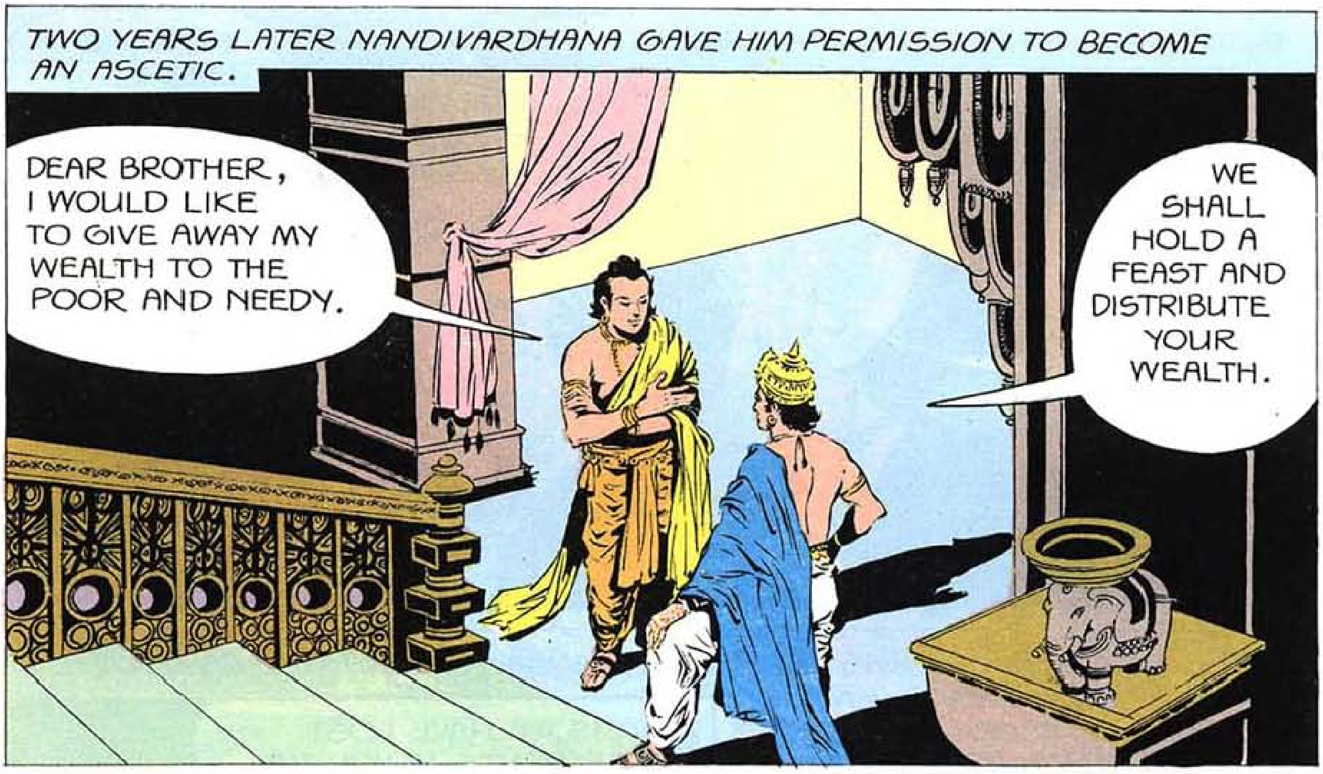

BY HIS MERE TOUCH...
...MAHAVIRA MANAGED TO CALM IT.
WHEN THEY FOUND THAT THE ELEPHANT HAD CALMED DOWN, THE PEOPLE CAME CAUTIOUSLY OUT OF THEIR SHELTERS AND STARED AT MAHAVIRA IN AWE.

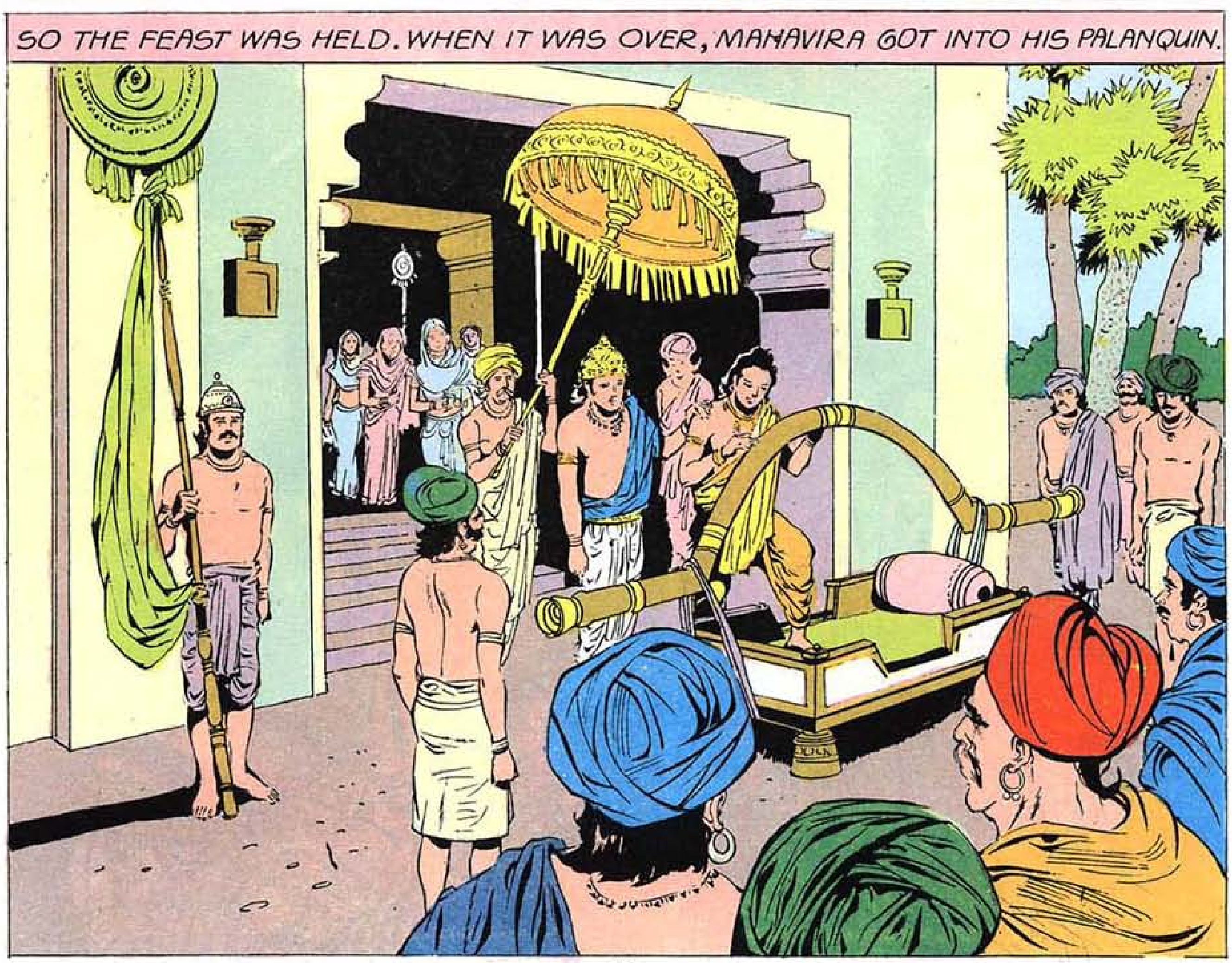

THE STORY OF MAHAVIRA'S ADVENTURES SOON SPREAD AND—
IT WAS COURAGEOUS OF HIM TO DARE THE COBRA!
WHAT ABOUT THE MAD ELEPHANT? THAT WAS THE HEIGHT OF BRAVERY.
HE IS DESTINED TO BE SOMEBODY GREAT. REMEMBER THE PROPHECY.
BUT IN SPITE OF ALL THE LOVE AND PRAISE SHOWERED ON HIM, MAHAVIRA WAS AN UNHAPPY SOUL.
THE WORLD IS TORN BY DIFFERENCE OF CASTE, COLOUR CREED AND SOCIAL STATUS. AS A RESULT MAN IS ALWAYS SORROWFUL. THERE MUST BE A WAY OUT...
...AND I MUST FIND IT. I SHALL ASK MY PARENTS TO ALLOW ME TO BECOME AN ASCETIC. I MUST SEPARATE REALITY FROM APPEARANCE AND SEEK TO KNOW THE TRUE NATURE OF THINGS.


SO HE APPROACHED HIS PARENTS.
DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER, PLEASE ALLOW ME TO RENOUNCE MY PRINCELY LIFE. I WISH TO GO AWAY AND FIND A WAY TO LESSEN THE MISERY OF MANKIND.
HIS MOTHER WAS AGHAST.
NO MAHAVIRA, NEVER! I WILL NEVER LET YOU GO. IF I AM PARTED FROM YOU I SHALL DIE OF GRIEF.
BELOVED SON, GIVE UP THESE IDEAS AT LEAST AS LONG AS YOUR MOTHER LIVES.
WHEN MAHAVIRA SAW HOW GRIEVED HIS PARENTS WERE, HE MADE A DECISION.
PLEASE DON'T CRY, MOTHER. I WILL NOT TALK OF GOING AWAY AS LONG AS BOTH OF YOU ARE ALIVE. I PROMISE.

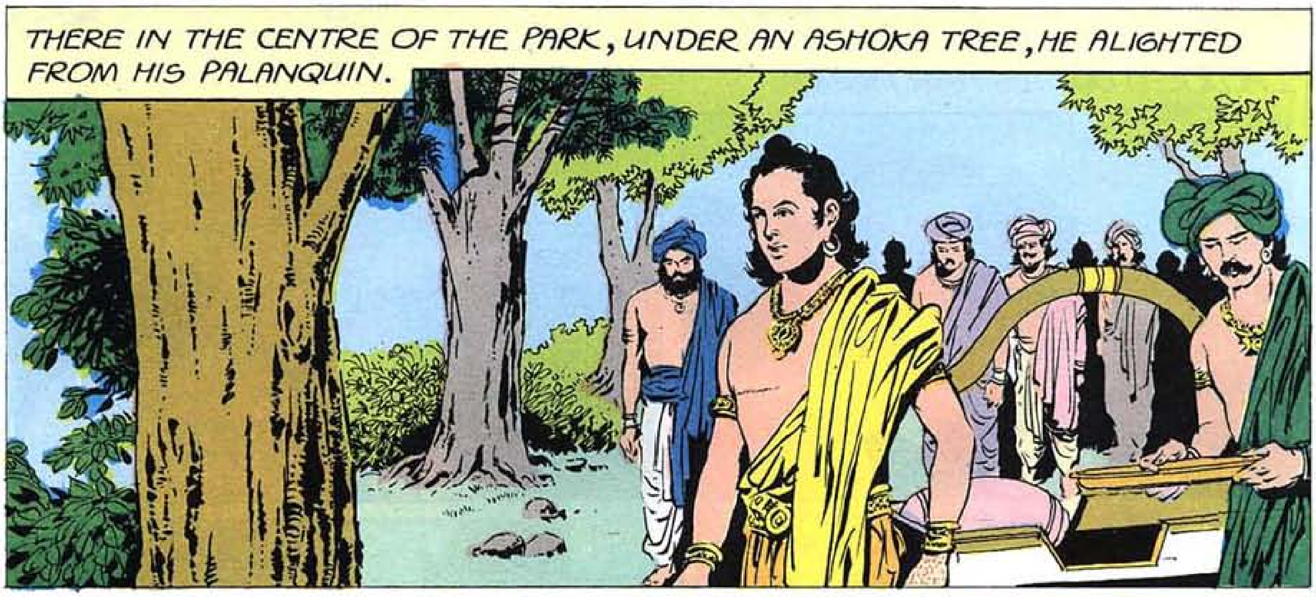


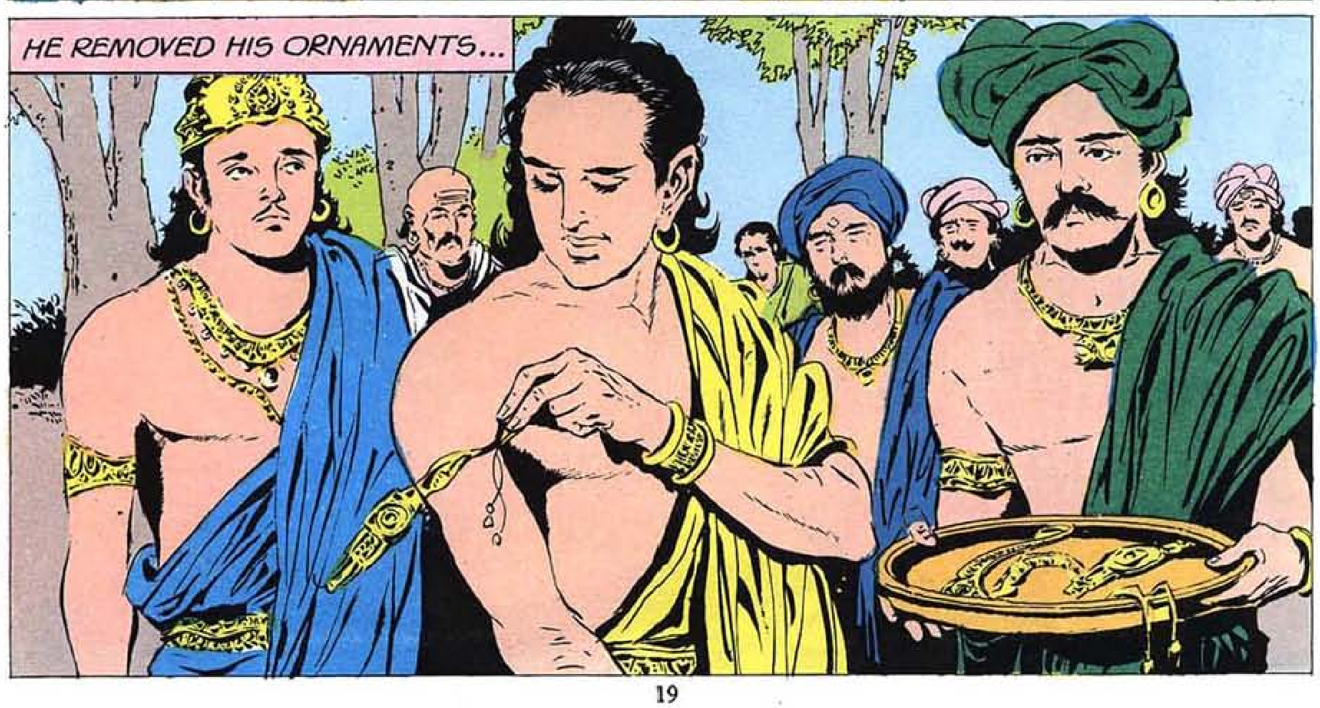
AS SOON AS MAHAVIRA LEFT THE ROOM –
HE HAS PROMISED NOT TO GO WHILE WE LIVE. WHAT WILL HAPPEN AFTER WE ARE DEAD ?
NOTHING LIES IN OUR HANDS. REMEMBER, HE IS DESTINED TO BECOME **GREAT**.
WITH THAT THOUGHT THEY CONSOLED THEMSELVES.
BY THE TIME MAHAVIRA WAS 28 YEARS OLD, BOTH HIS PARENTS HAD DIED. HIS ELDER BROTHER, NANDIVARDHANA BECAME KING.
I AM NOW FREE TO BECOME AN ASCETIC. I SHALL ASK NANDIVARDHANA TO PERMIT ME TO TAKE THE VOWS.
BUT NANDIVARDHANA WAS RELUCTANT.
AS IT IS, WE HAVE LOST OUR PARENTS. IF YOU TOO GO AWAY, I SHALL BE DESOLATE.
DEAR BROTHER. I WON'T GO NOW. I'LL WAIT FOR A YEAR OR TWO.

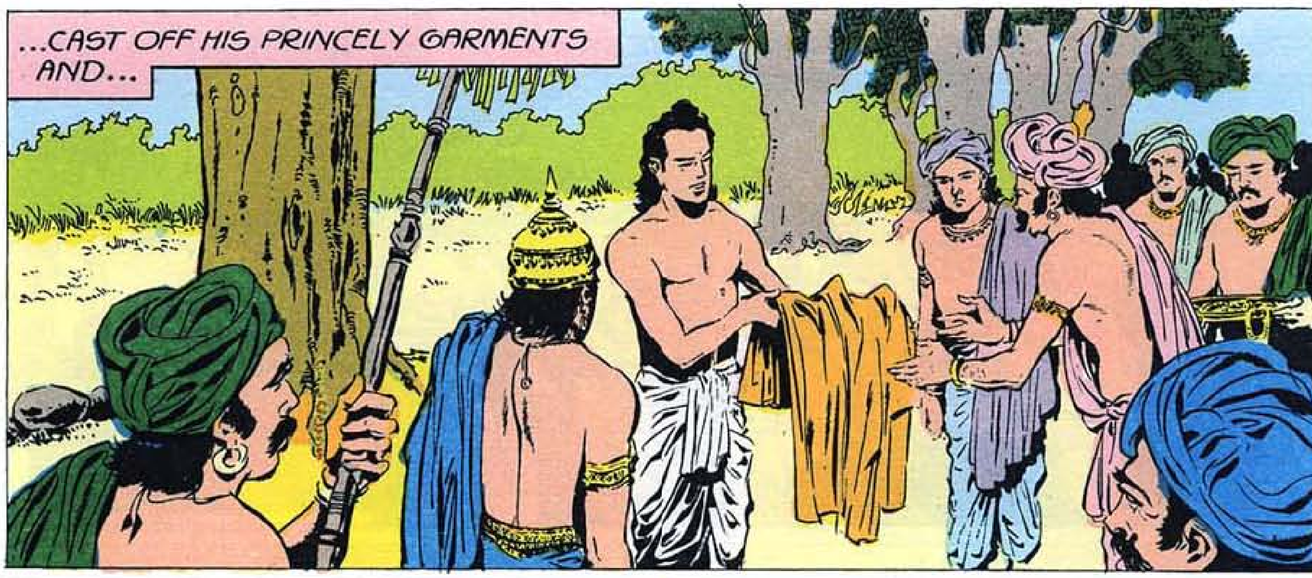

TWO YEARS LATER NANDIVARDHANA GAVE HIM PERMISSION TO BECOME AN ASCETIC.
DEAR BROTHER, I WOULD LIKE TO GIVE AWAY MY WEALTH TO THE POOR AND NEEDY.
WE SHALL HOLD A FEAST AND DISTRIBUTE YOUR WEALTH.


SO THE FEAST WAS HELD. WHEN IT WAS OVER, MAHAVIRA GOT INTO HIS PALANQUIN.

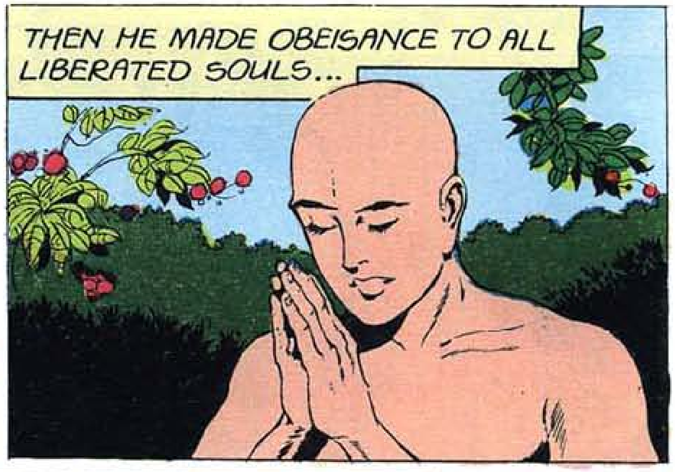

THEN HE PROCEEDED TO A PARK IN THE VICINITY.

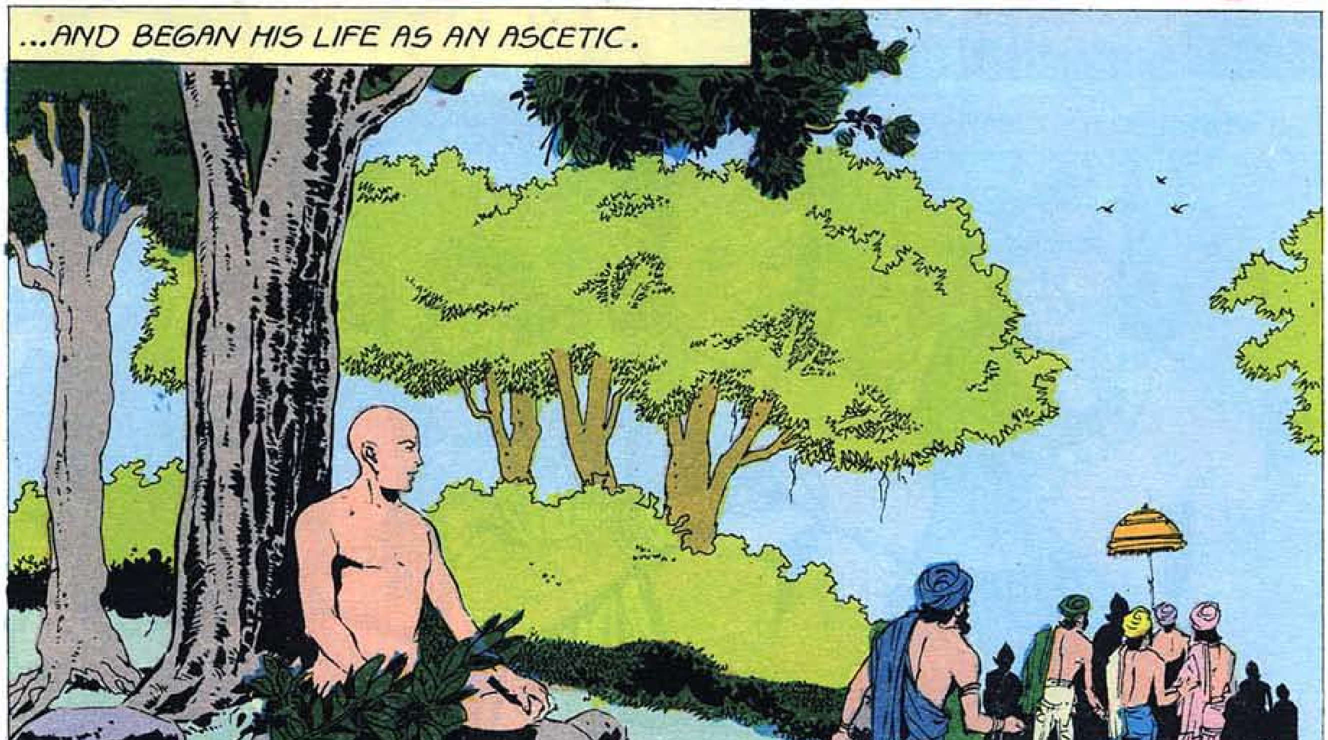

THERE IN THE CENTRE OF THE PARK, UNDER AN ASHOKA TREE, HE ALIGHTED FROM HIS PALANQUIN.

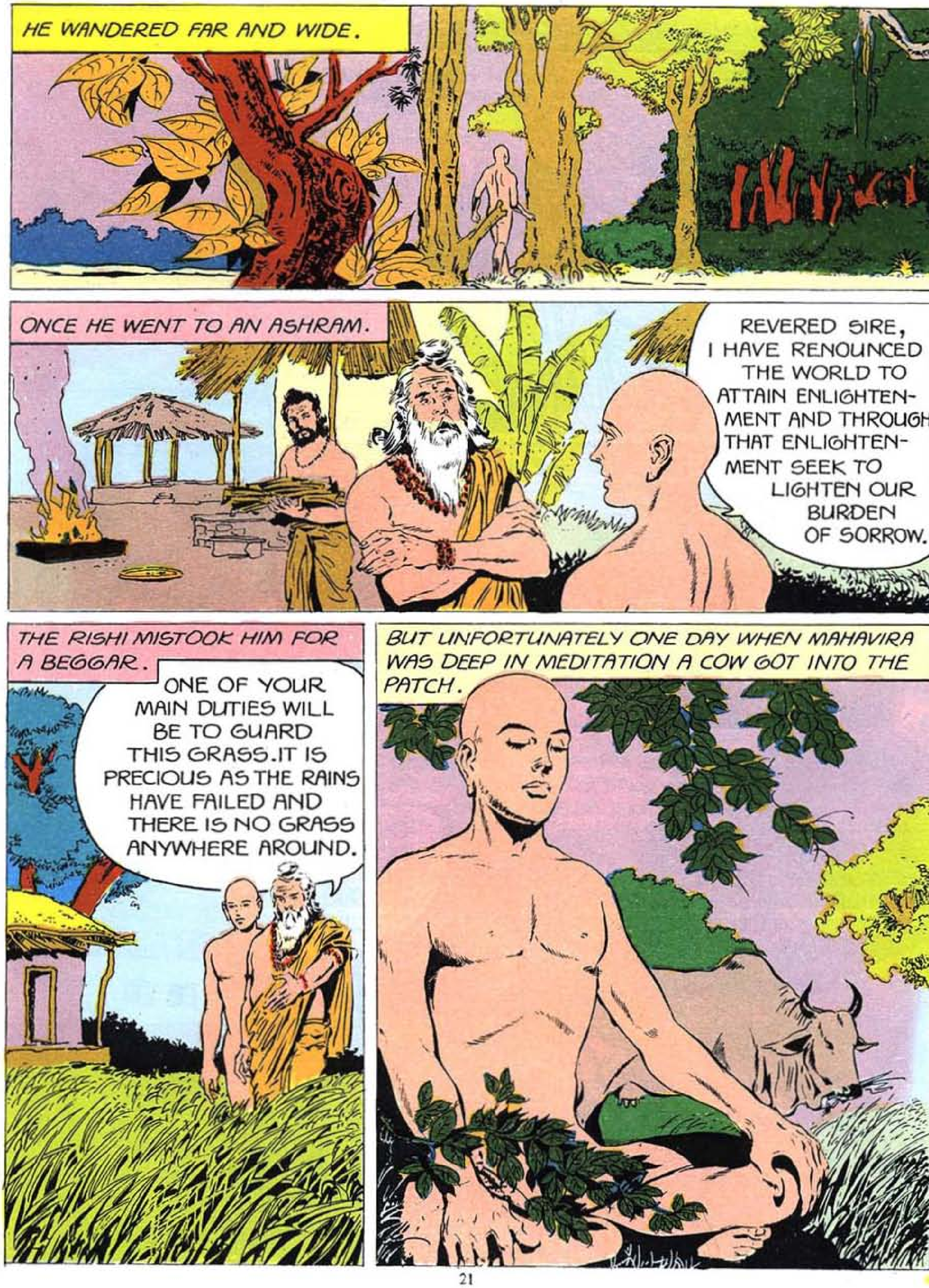

HE REMOVED HIS ORNAMENTS...


...CAST OFF HIS PRINCELY GARMENTS AND...

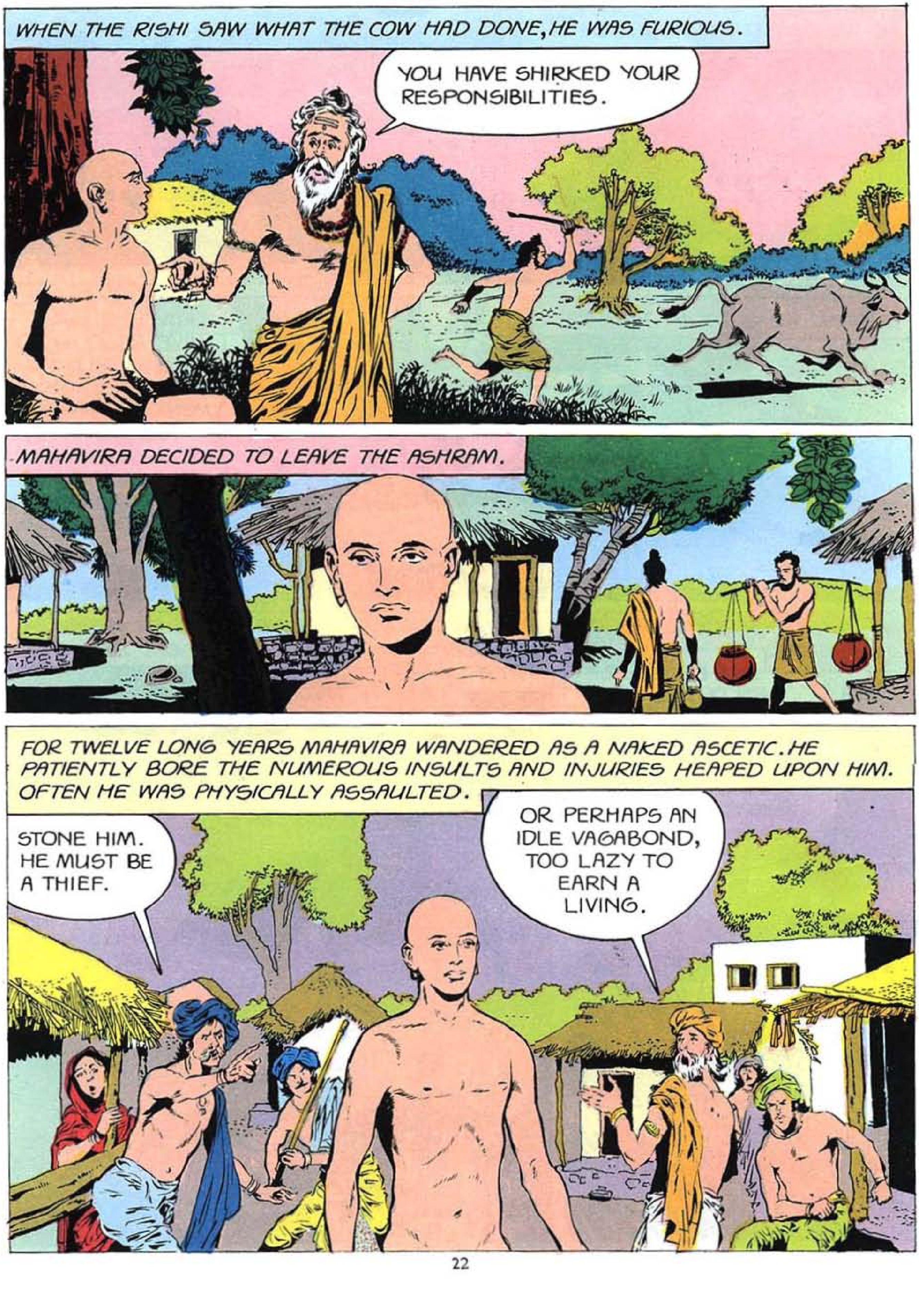

...PLUCKED OUT HIS HAIR IN FIVE HANDFULS.

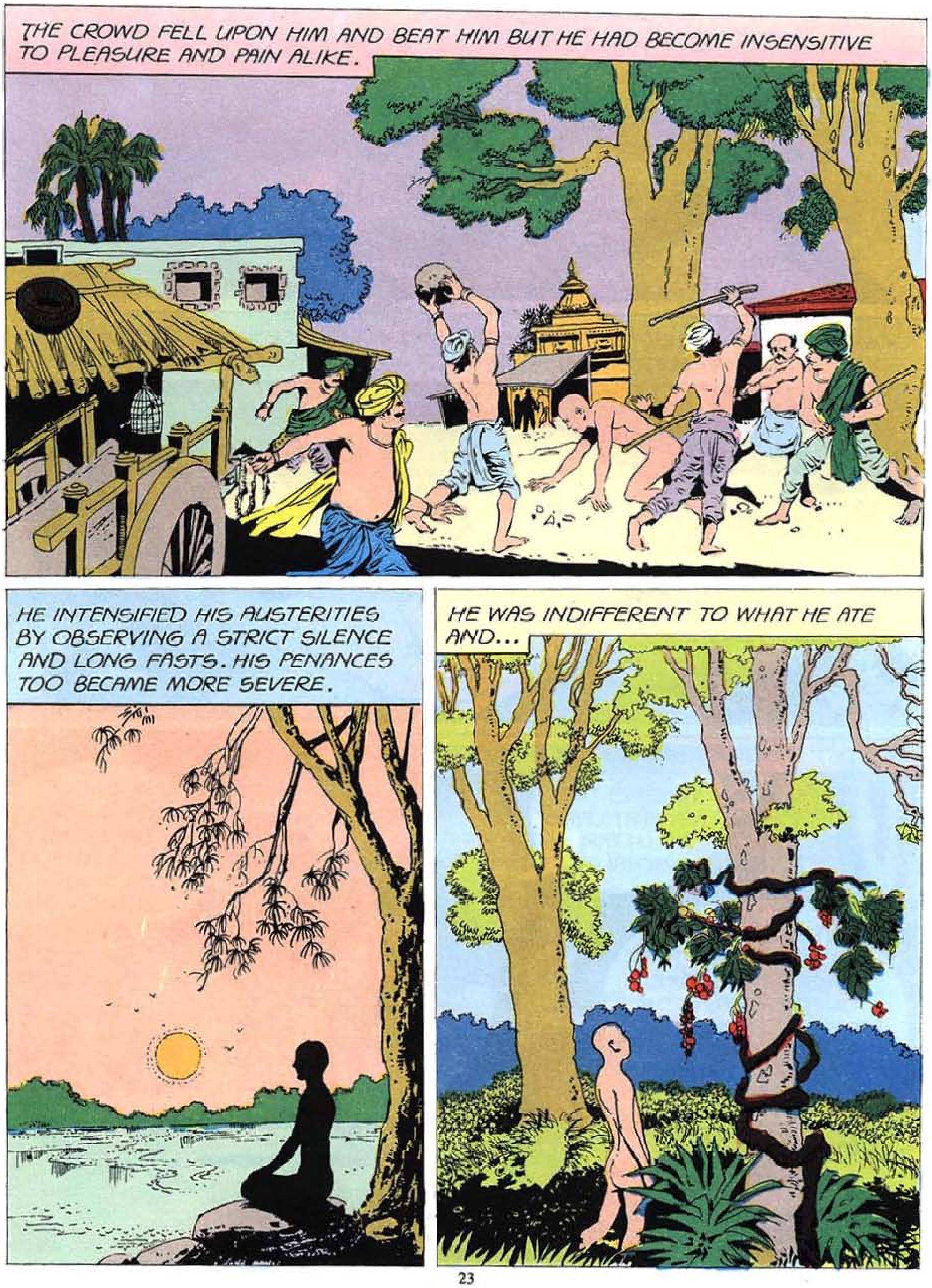

THEN HE MADE OBEISANCE TO ALL LIBERATED SOULS...

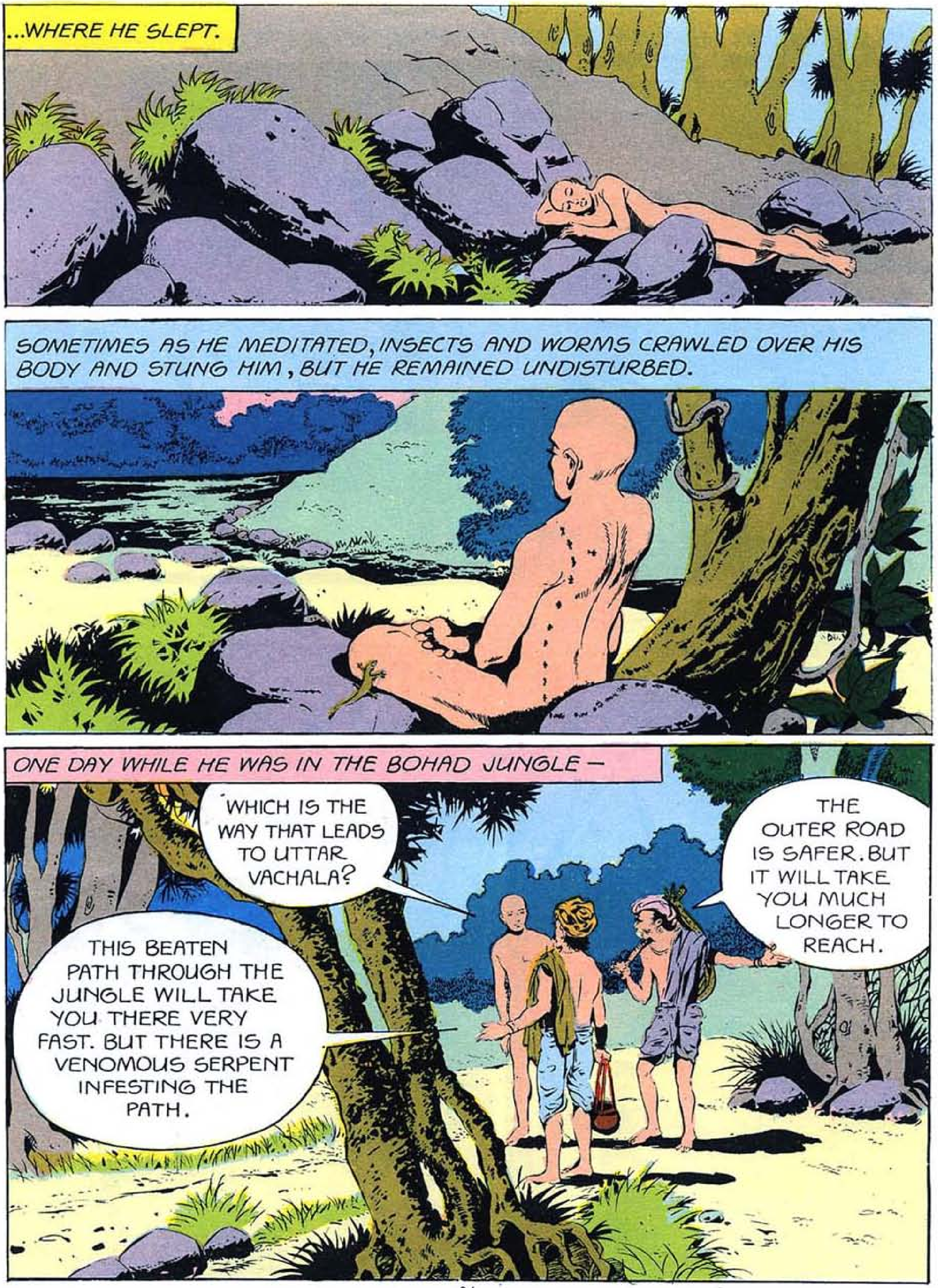

...AND BEGAN HIS LIFE AS AN ASCETIC.

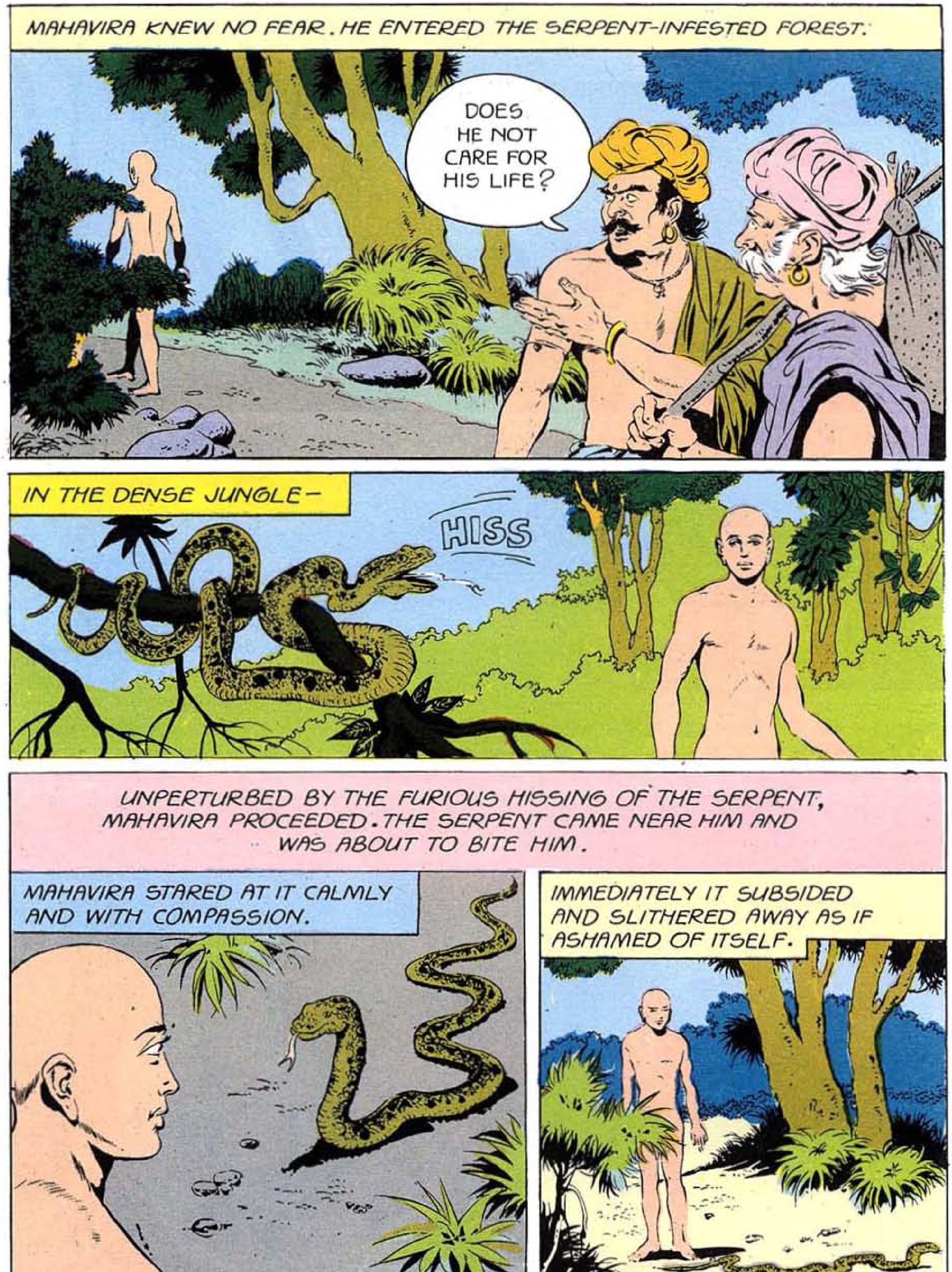


HE WANDERED FAR AND WIDE.
ONCE HE WENT TO AN ASHRAM.
REVERED SIRE, I HAVE RENOUNCED THE WORLD TO ATTAIN ENLIGHTENMENT AND THROUGH THAT ENLIGHTENMENT SEEK TO LIGHTEN OUR BURDEN OF SORROW.
THE RISHI MISTOOK HIM FOR A BEGGAR.
ONE OF YOUR MAIN DUTIES WILL BE TO GUARD THIS GRASS. IT IS PRECIOUS AS THE RAINS HAVE FAILED AND THERE IS NO GRASS ANYWHERE AROUND.
BUT UNFORTUNATELY ONE DAY WHEN MAHAVIRA WAS DEEP IN MEDITATION A COW GOT INTO THE PATCH.


WHEN THE RISHI SAW WHAT THE COW HAD DONE, HE WAS FURIOUS.
YOU HAVE SHIRKED YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES.
MAHAVIRA DECIDED TO LEAVE THE ASHRAM.
FOR TWELVE LONG YEARS MAHAVIRA WANDERED AS A NAKED ASCETIC. HE PATIENTLY BORE THE NUMEROUS INSULTS AND INJURIES HEAPED UPON HIM. OFTEN HE WAS PHYSICALLY ASSAULTED.
STONE HIM. HE MUST BE A THIEF.
OR PERHAPS AN IDLE VAGABOND, TOO LAZY TO EARN A LIVING.

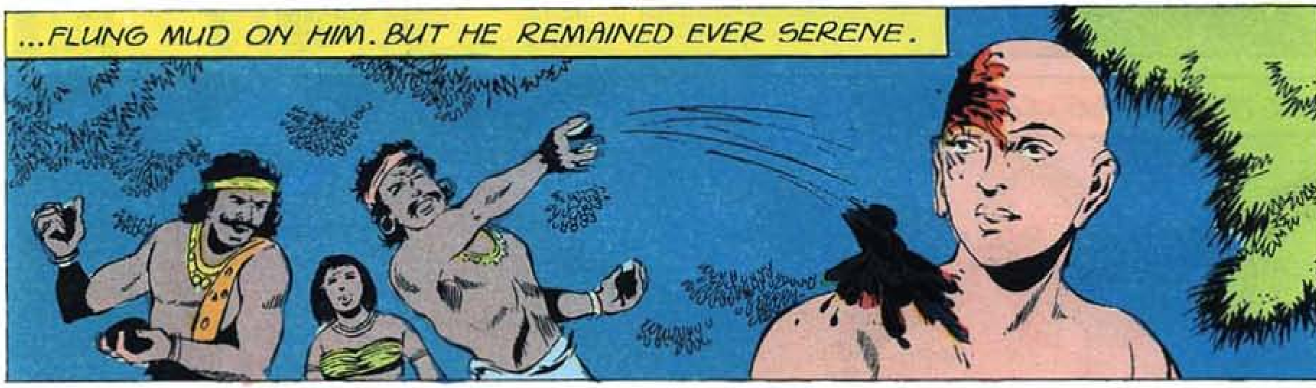

THE CROWD FELL UPON HIM AND BEAT HIM BUT HE HAD BECOME INSENSITIVE TO PLEASURE AND PAIN ALIKE.
HE INTENSIFIED HIS AUSTERITIES BY OBSERVING A STRICT SILENCE AND LONG FASTS. HIS PENANCES TOO BECAME MORE SEVERE.
HE WAS INDIFFERENT TO WHAT HE ATE AND...

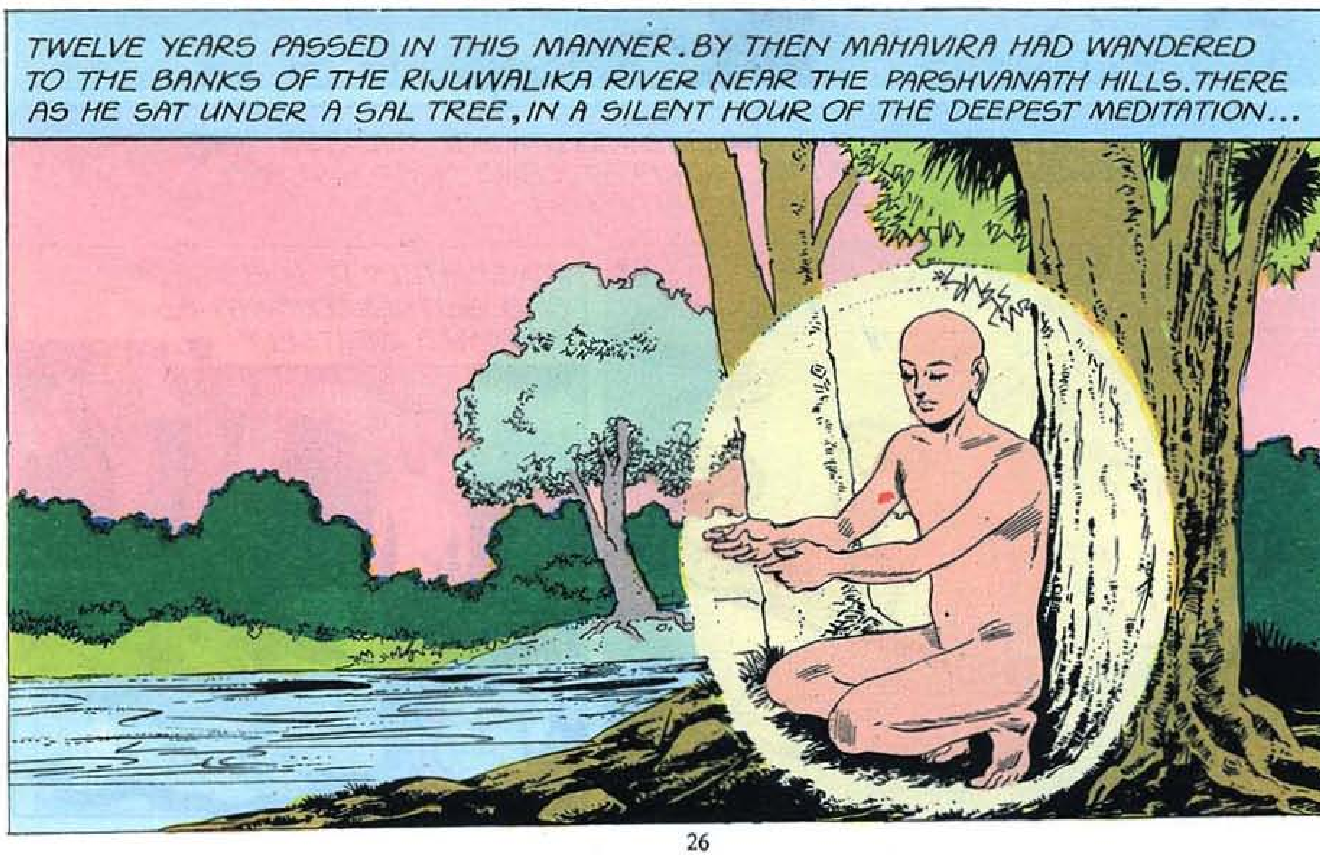

...WHERE HE SLEPT.
SOMETIMES AS HE MEDITATED, INSECTS AND WORMS CRAWLED OVER HIS BODY AND STUNG HIM, BUT HE REMAINED UNDISTURBED.
ONE DAY WHILE HE WAS IN THE BOHAD JUNGLE—
WHICH IS THE WAY THAT LEADS TO UTTAR VACHALA?
THIS BEATEN PATH THROUGH THE JUNGLE WILL TAKE YOU THERE VERY FAST. BUT THERE IS A VENOMOUS SERPENT INFESTING THE PATH.
THE OUTER ROAD IS SAFER. BUT IT WILL TAKE YOU MUCH LONGER TO REACH.

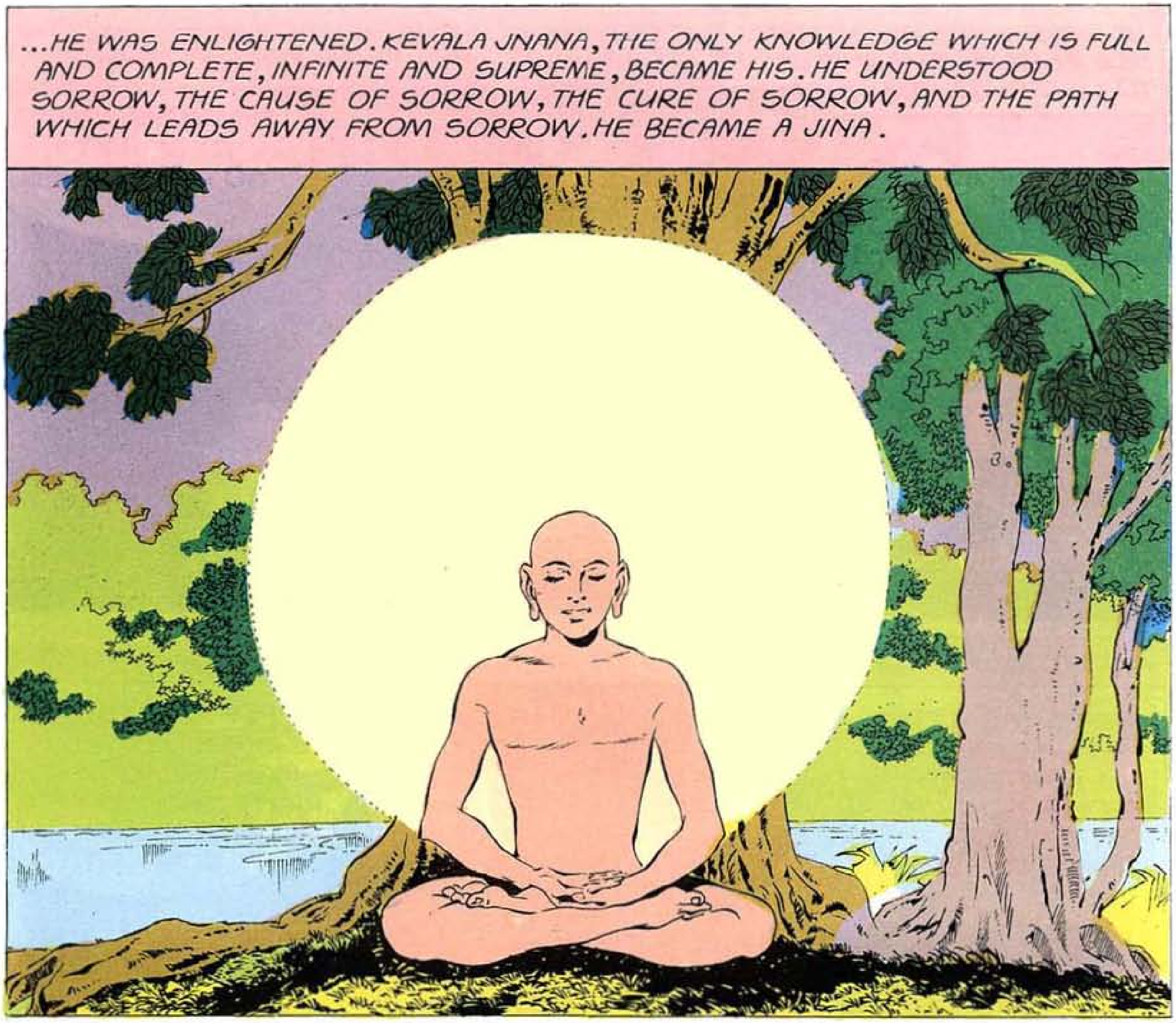


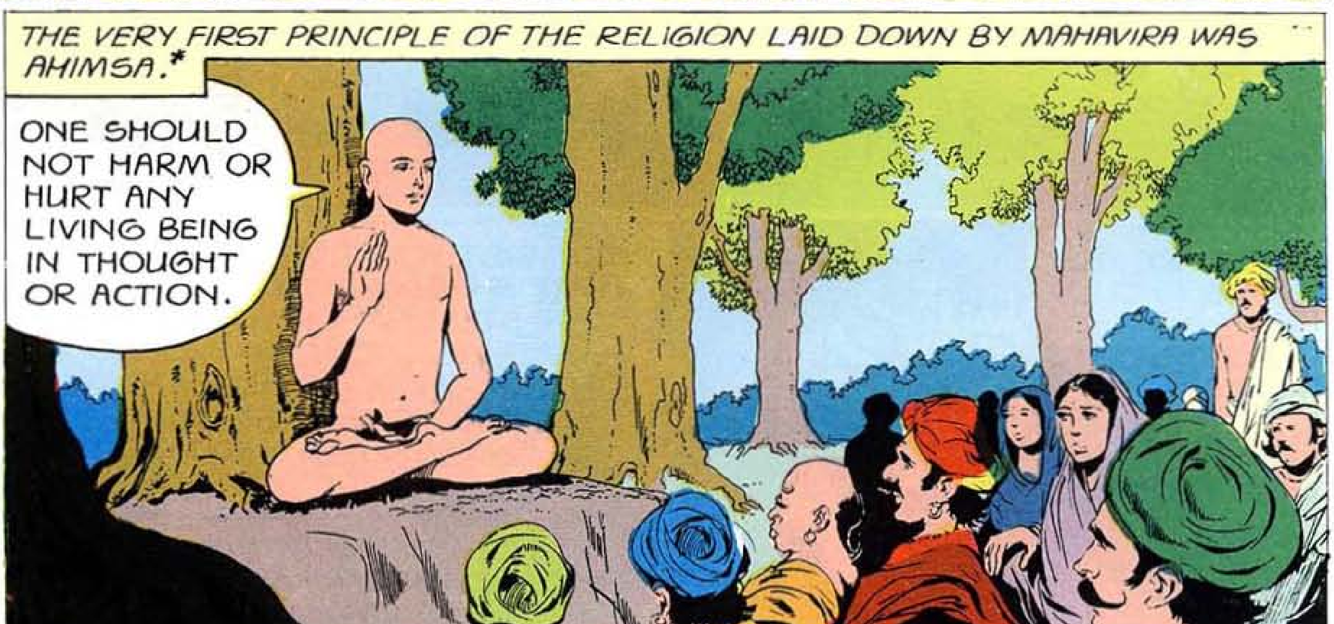
MAHAVIRA KNEW NO FEAR. HE ENTERED THE SERPENT-INFESTED FOREST.
DOES HE NOT CARE FOR HIS LIFE?
IN THE DENSE JUNGLE—
HISS
UNPERTURBED BY THE FURIOUS HISSING OF THE SERPENT, MAHAVIRA PROCEEDED. THE SERPENT CAME NEAR HIM AND WAS ABOUT TO BITE HIM.
MAHAVIRA STARED AT IT CALMLY AND WITH COMPASSION.
IMMEDIATELY IT SUBSIDED AND SLITHERED AWAY AS IF ASHAMED OF ITSELF.


IF EVER HE WANDERED INTO THE VILLAGES IN THE TRIBAL AREAS, THE PEOPLE SET THEIR DOGS ON HIM AND...


...FLUNG MUD ON HIM. BUT HE REMAINED EVER SERENE.


TWELVE YEARS PASSED IN THIS MANNER. BY THEN MAHAVIRA HAD WANDERED TO THE BANKS OF THE RIJUWALIKA RIVER NEAR THE PARSHVANATH HILLS. THERE AS HE SAT UNDER A SAL TREE, IN A SILENT HOUR OF THE DEEPEST MEDITATION...


...HE WAS ENLIGHTENED. KEVALA JNANA, THE ONLY KNOWLEDGE WHICH IS FULL AND COMPLETE, INFINITE AND SUPREME, BECAME HIS. HE UNDERSTOOD SORROW, THE CAUSE OF SORROW, THE CURE OF SORROW, AND THE PATH WHICH LEADS AWAY FROM SORROW. HE BECAME A JINA.

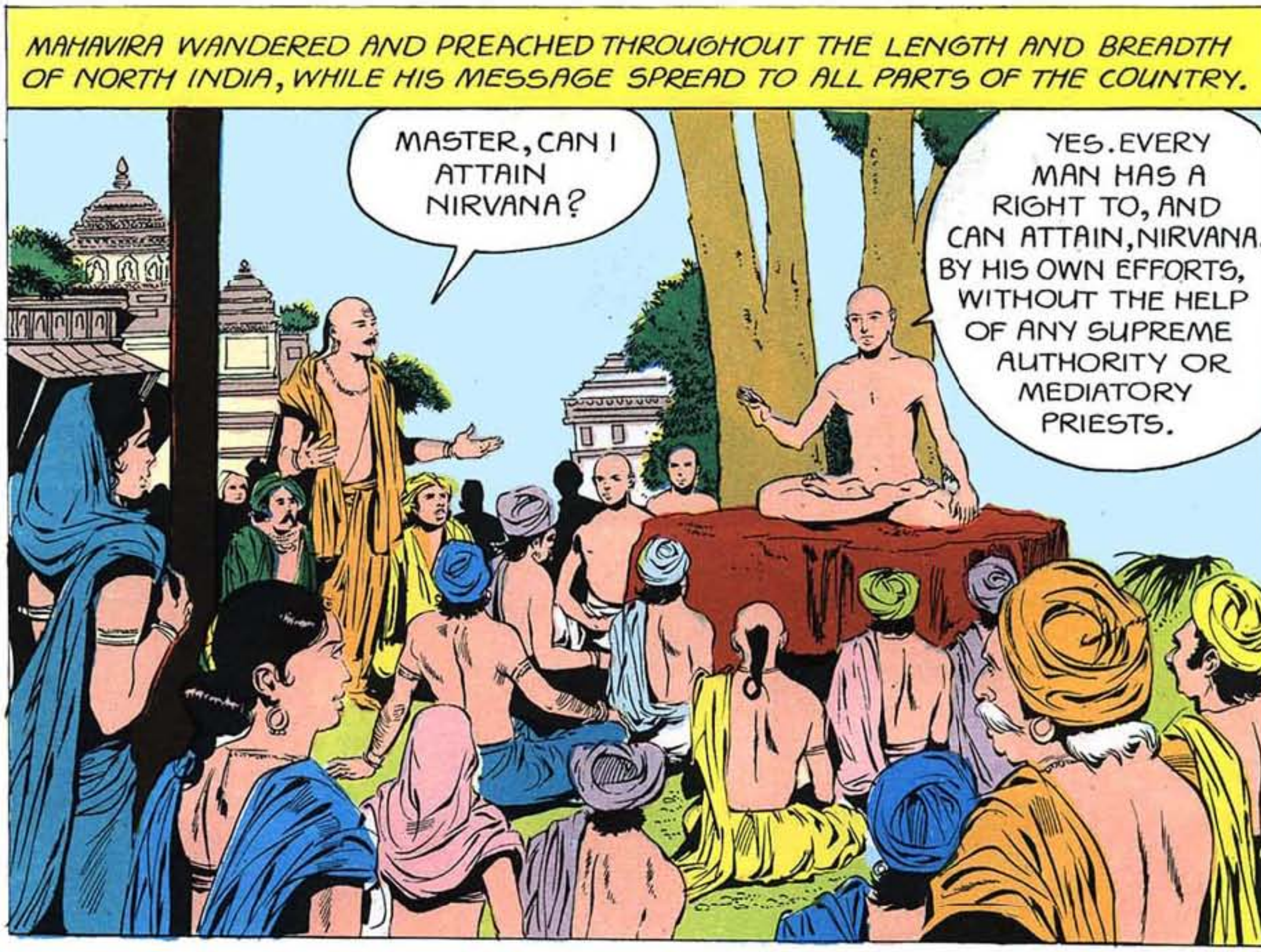

THE VERY FIRST PRINCIPLE OF THE RELIGION LAID DOWN BY MAHAVIRA WAS AHIMSA.*
ONE SHOULD NOT HARM OR HURT ANY LIVING BEING IN THOUGHT OR ACTION.

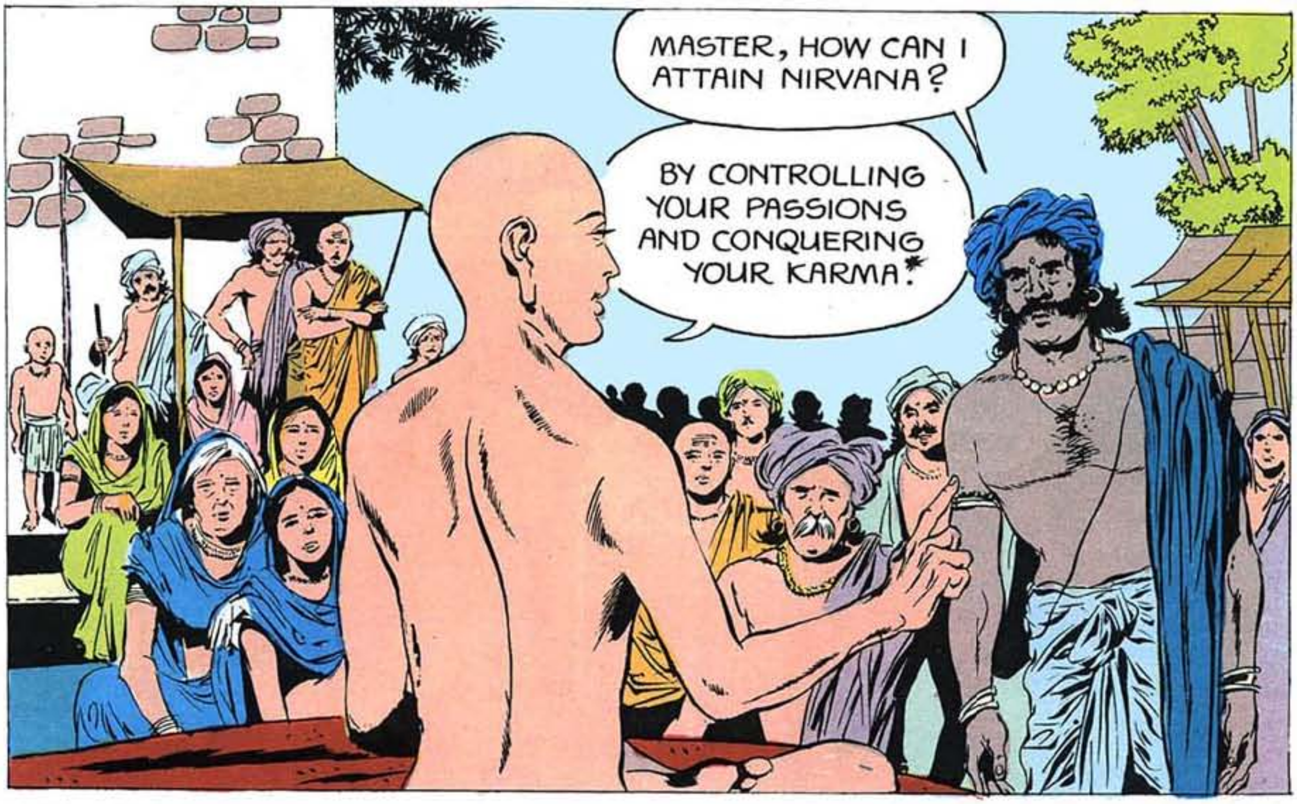


* THE STATE OF FINAL EMANCIPATION.

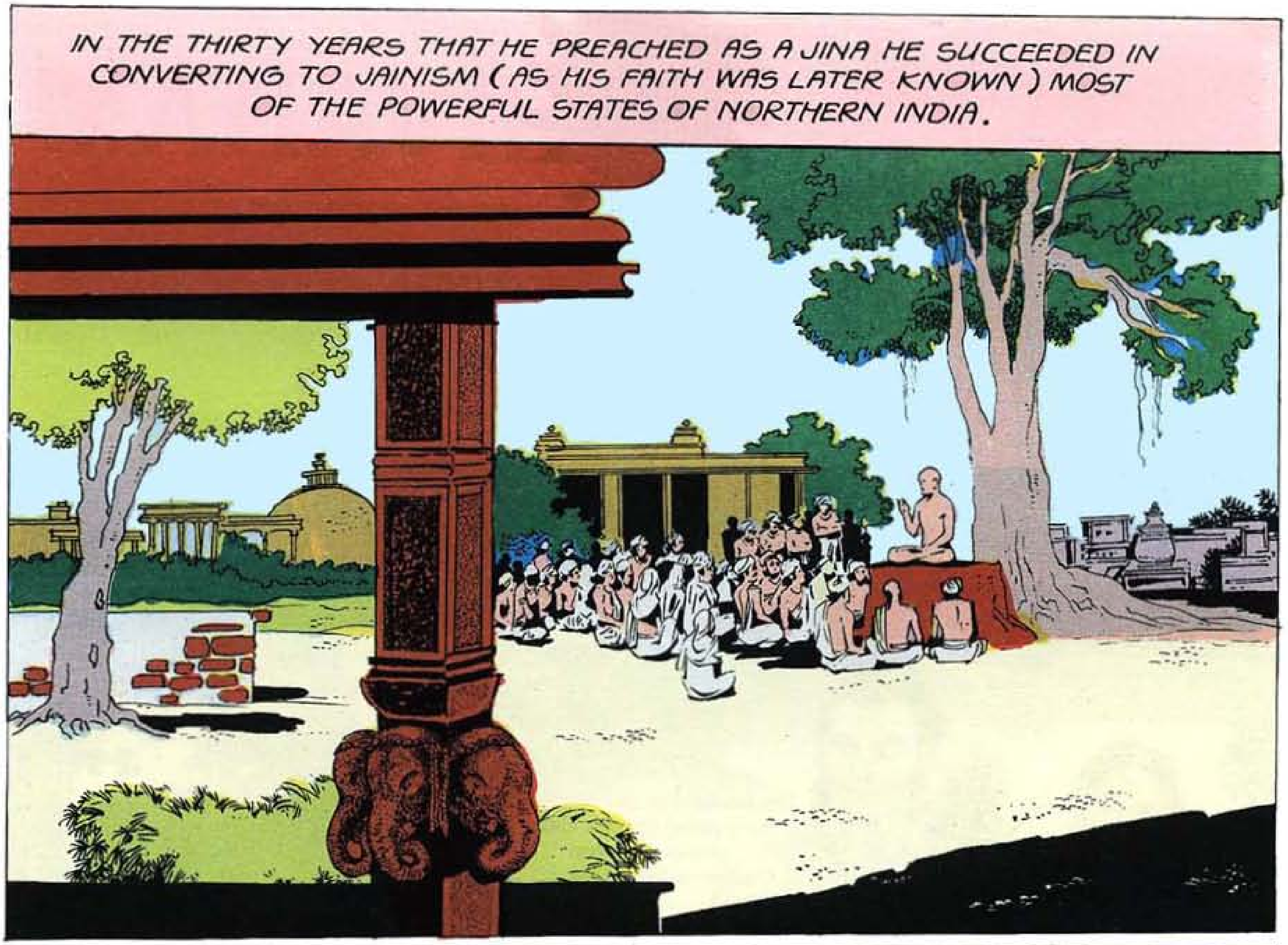

TO HIS DISCOURSES HE WELCOMED PEOPLE OF ALL CASTES, AGES, CLASSES AND SEXES.
THE CHANDALA* RISHIKESH, IT IS REPORTED, RECEIVED THE MASTER'S MESSAGE.
AND CHANDANBALA, HIS FIRST COUSIN IS THE HEAD OF HIS FEMALE DISCIPLES.
HIS FOLLOWERS LISTENED TO HIM WITH RESPECT, ACCEPTED HIS TEACHINGS WITH FAITH AND TRIED TO PRACTISE THEM AS WELL AS THEY COULD.
MASTER, I AM HUNGRY.
COME IN AND EAT WITH US, MY GOOD MAN.
THE WIFE CALLED HER HUSBAND ASIDE.
HOW COULD YOU? HE IS A CHANDALA.
IF THE MASTER CAN ADMIT A CHANDALA INTO HIS SANGHA, SURELY WE CAN AT LEAST FEED ONE.

* OUTCASTE.





KARMA: YOUR DESTINY FOLLOWING FROM YOUR THOUGHTS, ACTIONS AND KNOWLEDGE IN PREVIOUS BIRTH

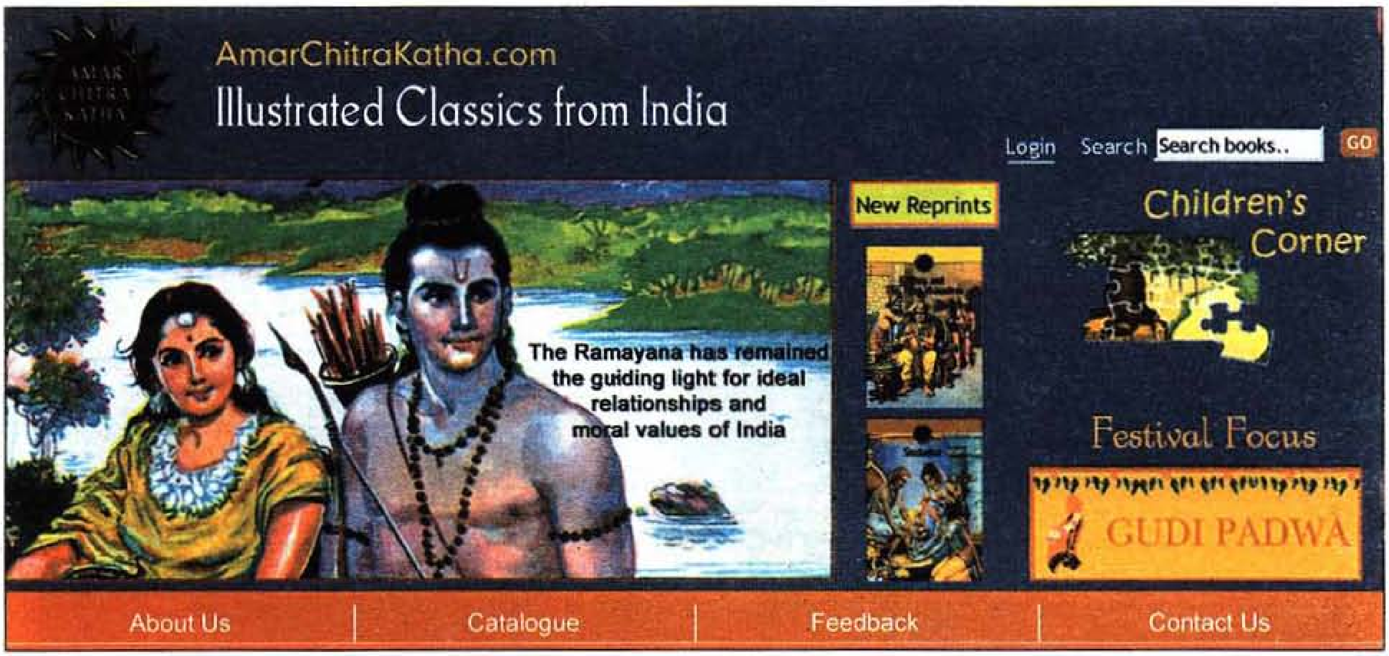

IN THE THIRTY YEARS THAT HE PREACHED AS A JINA HE SUCCEEDED IN CONVERTING TO JAINISM (AS HIS FAITH WAS LATER KNOWN) MOST OF THE POWERFUL STATES OF NORTHERN INDIA.


THEN AT THE AGE OF SEVENTY-TWO, AT PAVAPURI IN BIHAR, HE ATTAINED NIRVANA, FREED FOR EVER FROM ALL MISERY, FROM ALL PAIN.

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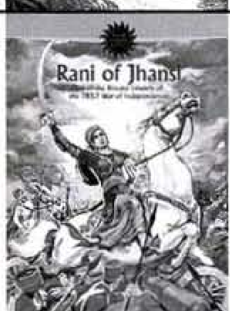
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Mahavira

Mahavira was born in Kundagram near Vaishali in Bihar to King Siddhartha and his wife, Trishala, in 599 BC. Prince Vardhamana, as he was named, was destined to become great. After years of contemplation on life and the ultimate truth, he renounced the world and became an ascetic at the age of 30.

For 12 long years he practised deep meditation, silence and compassion, leading a life of austerity and penance. At the end of this period, he achieved enlightenment - full knowledge or *kevala gyana* - and went on to become the 24th Jain Tirthankara (one who finds enlightenment and shows the way to others).

Bhagawan Mahavira, however, was neither a pioneer of Jainism nor its last Tirthankara. Jain tradition believes that there have been many Tirthankaras before Mahavira, and there will be several in the future. Mahavira himself said that his religious teachings - based on the Jain principles of *ahimsa, karma and nirvana* - had been propounded by many Jinas (one who has conquered) in the past, and will be taught by many Jinas in the future.

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